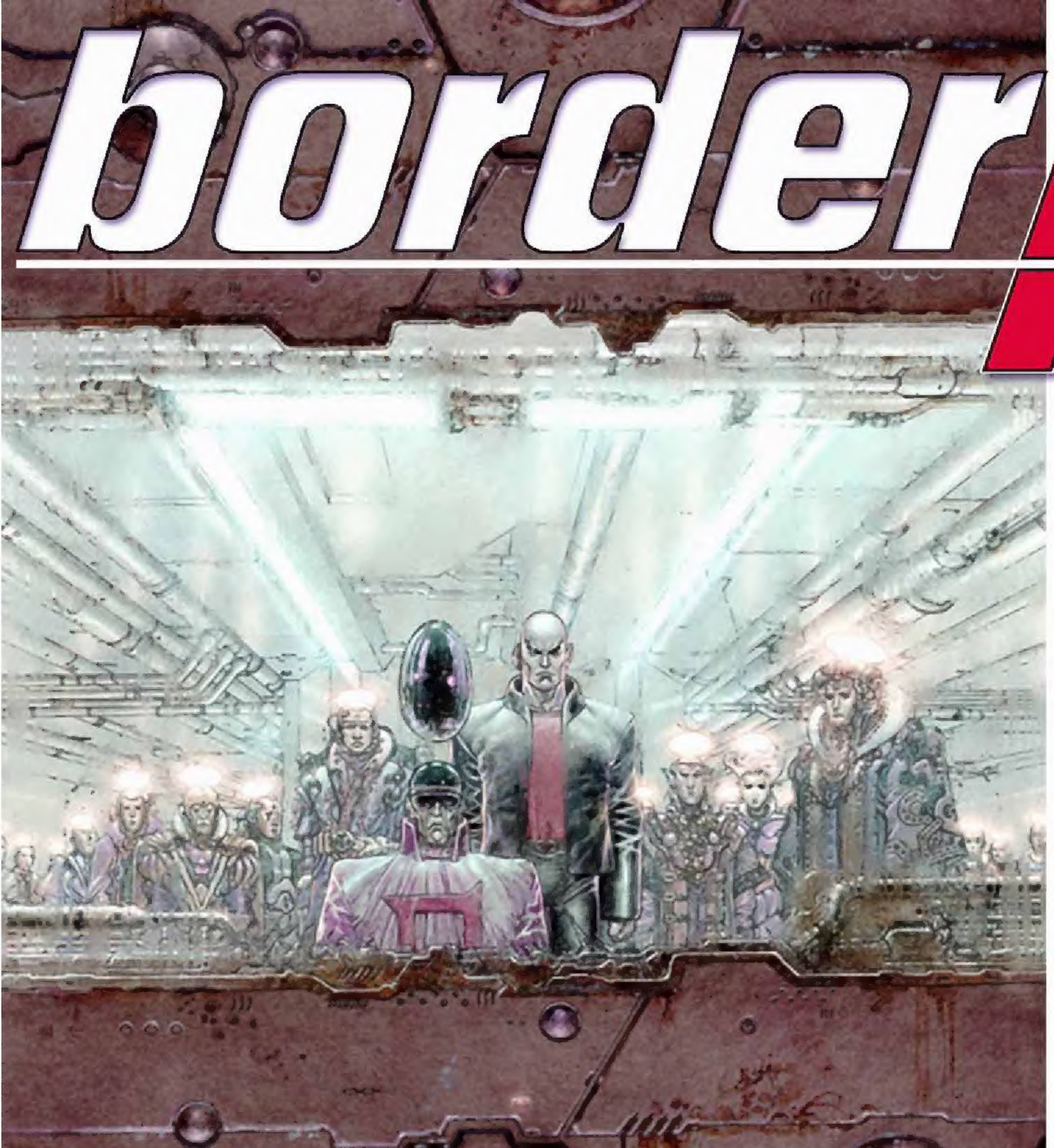
borderline

THE Comics Magazine

April #9



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Stan Lee
Judge Dredd Audio
Steve Ince
Mike Mignola
Tank Girl
Harry Kremer
Osamu Tezuka
P. Craig Russell's Ring
PJ Holden
Anthony Williams

Columns • Reviews
News • Views
Small Press

To make your enjoyment of Borderline an even easier experience, follow the simple point and click instructions: All contents have an internal link, allowing you to click on them and be taken automatically to that page. The Globe symbol at the bottom right of each page will take you back to the contents page.

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THE COMICS MAGAZINE

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COOL BEANS WORLD

Plus you can get to us through any of the usual links we've established over the last nine months.

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This month's awesomely huge thanks go to Cool Beans Productions, my editorial team, Shawna Ervin-Gore, Ian Sattler, Jim McLauchlin, Anthony Williams and Dan Whitehead. Cover design by the infinitely cool Jim Campbell, Art by Ladronn – I have an Incal-ing this is a Humanoids cover!! <groan>

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IN THE LINE OF FIRE

Phil Hall's editorial about the major changes...

IT DOESN'T seem like nine months since we launched this completely new and totally different kind of comics magazine. Yet we appear to have given birth to something that the rest of the world likes and wants! So much so that we've just signed a media partnership deal with our good friends at Cool Beans World!

I remember subbing the story about Cool Beans World's launch in Comics International, some time early last year. Being a renowned cynic I probably didn't give them much of a future. But as my old boss and mentor Dez Skinn often used to say, "A little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing." I probably viewed Cool Beans as just another half-arsed attempt by a bunch of amateurs to produce a range of comics that no one would be the slightest bit interested in.

So imagine my surprise when I finally visited CBW HQ and discovered that it was anything but a fly-by-night, tin-pot company run by a bunch of half-arsed amateurs! I was impressed by their set up. I was blown away by some of the ultra-special stuff its people are working on. And I was completely and utterly gobsmacked (a British expression) when they offered Borderline a "deal". Don't get me wrong, I think Borderline is the *best* comics magazine there has ever been, but one of the biggest hurdles in continuing to bring you guys the best of what's around is the finance. When CBW offered to bankroll Borderline *and* not want any editorial control at all, it was like a dream come true. And I didn't even have to compromise my principles...

The majority of the 11 years I worked on Comics International were absolutely happy ones - who wouldn't want to be paid for writing about their hobby? Not only did I get to be involved in the inner workings of the industry, I got to work with one of my heroes and best friends. However, there was one thing that Dez and I were forever arguing about. I refused to be party to pandering to our major advertisers. Don't get me wrong, I know and appreciate that it's a given, that if you want to continue getting advertising revenue from, say, Diamond or DC, you have to be seen being as non-confrontational as possible. The problem was I just didn't like it and the hungry journalist inside me kept saying "but...".

So, has Borderline sold out and bequeathed its soul to Cool Beans Productions? Nah... We wouldn't do that to *you*. The guys at CBW (and CBP the parent company) wouldn't want us to do that either. I'm not saying we won't be covering anything that's related to CBW, but we won't be telling you every time Simon Bisley takes a crap (even though I'm sure there's some of you out there who would positively relish that information!). There will be Cool Beans articles and features, but you have my assurance that these will be legit articles and not just me pandering to our new sponsors! They can take this horse to water, but they'll not make him drink... or something like that!

What's this deal involve and how will it affect you?

- We get better Internet access.
- You get speedier downloading times with less errors and problems.
- The budget will allow us to at least pay our contributors something.
- It will allow you to continue to read the best columns in comics at the moment.
- The backing, both financially and editorially, of a burgeoning company that is presently producing and reproducing some of the best comics to come out of Britain since the heyday of Warrior.
- It means we can try and bring you even more of what you want over the coming months!
- And for all of us: no more uncertainty about the future.

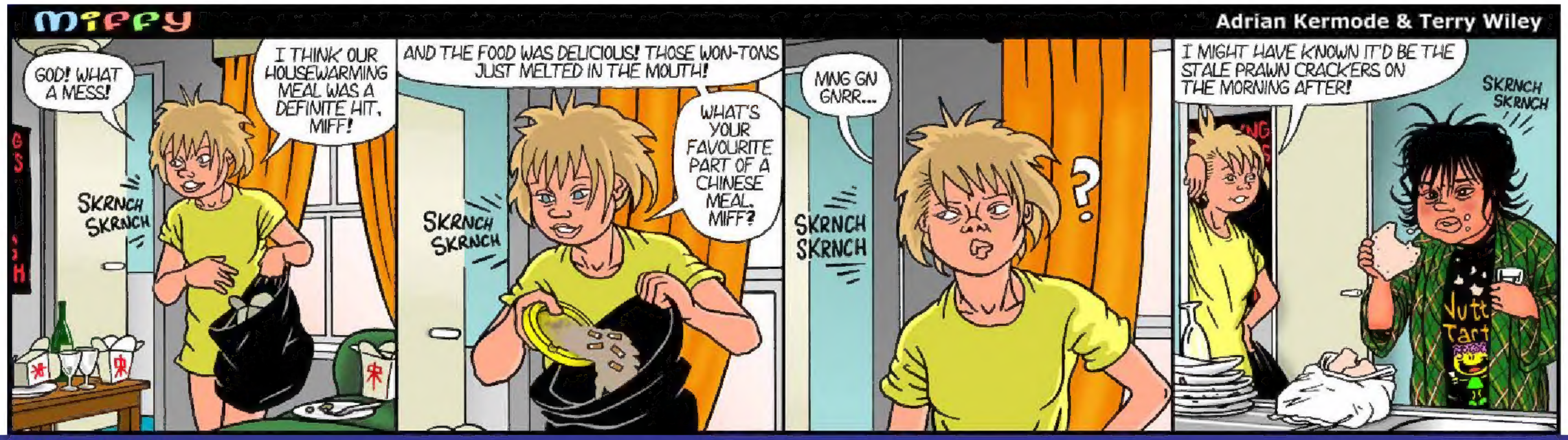
Of course one of the things I insisted on was that Borderline remains free. CBP didn't have any objections to that at all, in fact, I'm beginning to think these guys invented the word "cool".

So, where does that leave us? Borderline will continue to come out monthly, for at least the next six months, without much change at all. We've got some new stuff lined up and a few replacement columns (the *Peanuts* market research certainly was an eye opener for this editor), the usual bag of great interviews and features on everything from your favourite comic, to the one the bloke down the street is producing, to the myriad of wondrous stuff being produced all over the world. We're also taking on new contributors and columnists to show you that we're not just resting on our laurels, but we're striving to make Borderline be seen as a metamorphosing magazine!

Not since we launched last August has there ever been a better time to remind you all that Borderline is about the entire world of comics and not just about superheroes in spandex with big breasts and unfeasibly small feet.

Hold tight, things could get scary!

Phil Hall, Northampton 18/03/02


Miffy
Adrian Kermode & Terry Wiley
GOD! WHAT A MESS!
I THINK OUR HOUSEWARMING MEAL WAS A DEFINITE HIT, MIFF!
SKRNCH SKRNCH
AND THE FOOD WAS DELICIOUS! THOSE WON-TONS JUST MELTED IN THE MOUTH!
WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF A CHINESE MEAL, MIFF?
SKRNCH SKRNCH
MNG GN GNRR...
?
SKRNCH SKRNCH
I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN IT'D BE THE STALE PRAWN CRACKERS ON THE MORNING AFTER!
SKRNCH SKRNCH
Jutt Tart

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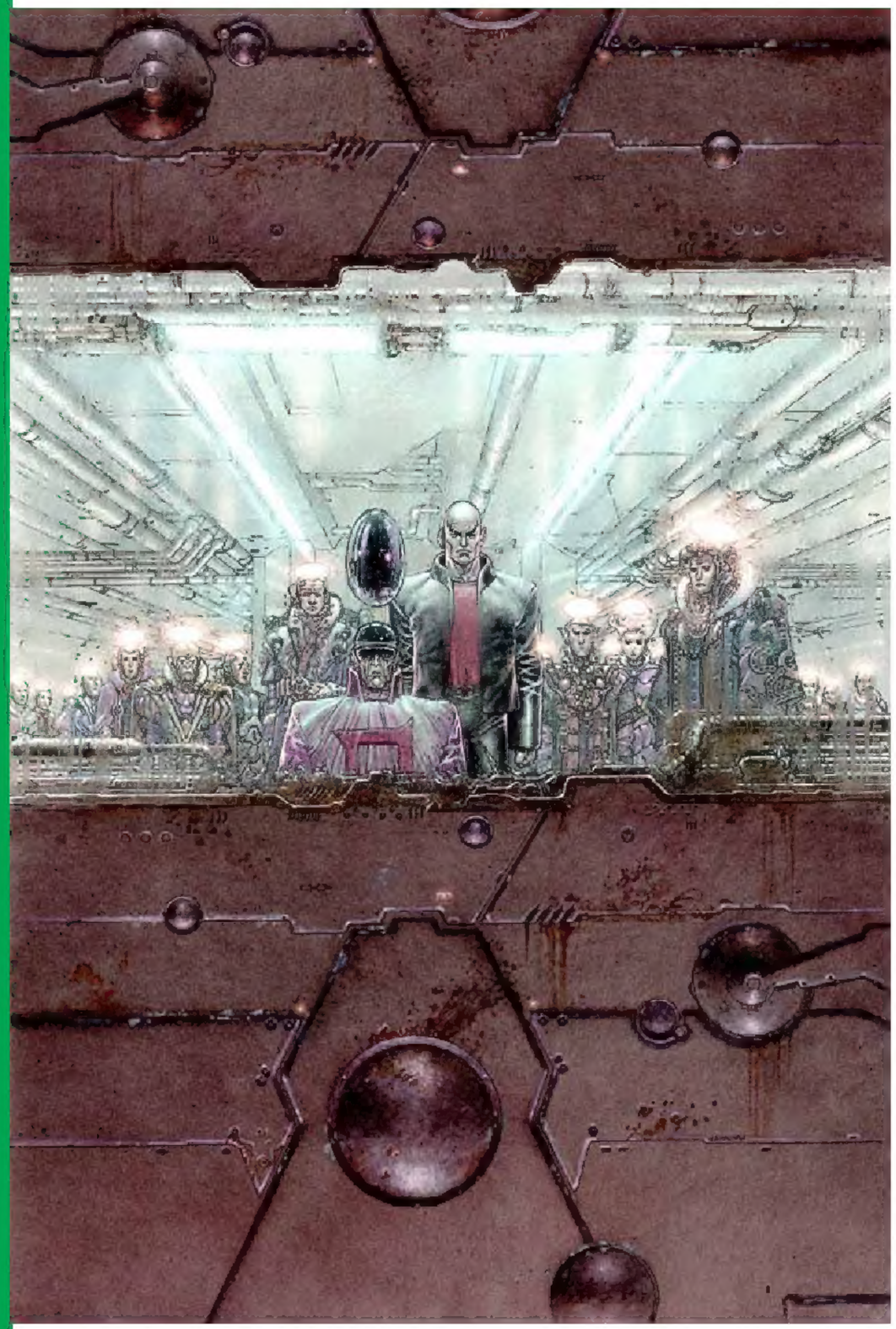

All illustrations throughout this article are from the extensive catalogue of Humanoids productions and are not necessarily related to the words that wrap around them...

DO HUMANOIDS DREAM OF ECLECTIC SHEEP?

Tom Lennon looks at the history of Métal Hurlant and talks to Fabrice Giger about what Humanoids' 2002 relaunch is going to be like; while Jay Eales explores exactly how Humanoids intends to take over the entire world and doesn't talk to Ian Sattler about what it's like to have all that nudity cut out...

SCREAM & SCREAM AGAIN – A History of Métal Hurlant

Some comics are defined as "classics". Others are regarded as influential, innovative titles years ahead of their time. Then there's ***Métal Hurlant****. To celebrate the imminent return of this classic anthology title, Tom Lennon takes a look at its remarkable legacy.*

A SURLY, weather-beaten warrior glides over a bizarre, hyperreal landscape, slouched on the back of a grey pterodactyl… an interstellar anti-hero battles vile, Lovecraftian demons through space and time… an incongruous adventurer in pith helmet and khaki tries to save the three-levelled world that he himself created…

Between 1975 and 1987, the legendary French science fiction anthology **Métal Hurlant** - which translates as "Screaming Metal" - published some of the most groundbreaking material and breathtaking imagery ever to grace the comics page. A list of the artists and writers who worked on the title - including Moebius, Philippe Druillet, Enki Bilal, Vaughn Bode, Jean-Claude Gal, Jacques Tardi and Richard Corben - scans like a Who's Who of international comics talent. Equally illustrious are the stories and characters it featured: **Arzach**, **Lone Sloane** and **The Airtight Garage** are just three examples that continue to delight and inspire comic fans and professionals alike. If that wasn't enough, it also played a key role in elevating comics to an artform throughout much of Western Europe and exerted an influence that - directly or indirectly - continues to reach far beyond the boundaries of our medium.

Humanoids Publishing must be experiencing some slight trepidation, then, as it prepares to relaunch the title on an unsuspecting world this July. Published now in English and in the US comic format, the first issue of the 48 page bimonthly certainly offers a strong line-up, including the serialization of **Megalex** by **Hurlant** alumni Alexandro Jodorowsky and his **TechnoPriests** collaborator Fred Beltran, and **Hunter's Moon**, a collaboration between Avengers scribe Kurt Busiek and Eurocomix protegé Gerald Parel.

It's the kind of opening salvo that would make a hardened comics editor eat his rolodex. Then again, **Métal Hurlant** never did do things by half…

A vast starship malfunctions, propelling an astronaut into a dark alternative reality where he is violently molested by an unholy trinity of sadistic demons…

Métal Hurlant was launched in January 1975 as the flagship title of Les Humanoïdes Associés, a French publishing venture set up by a group of ambitious comics veterans that

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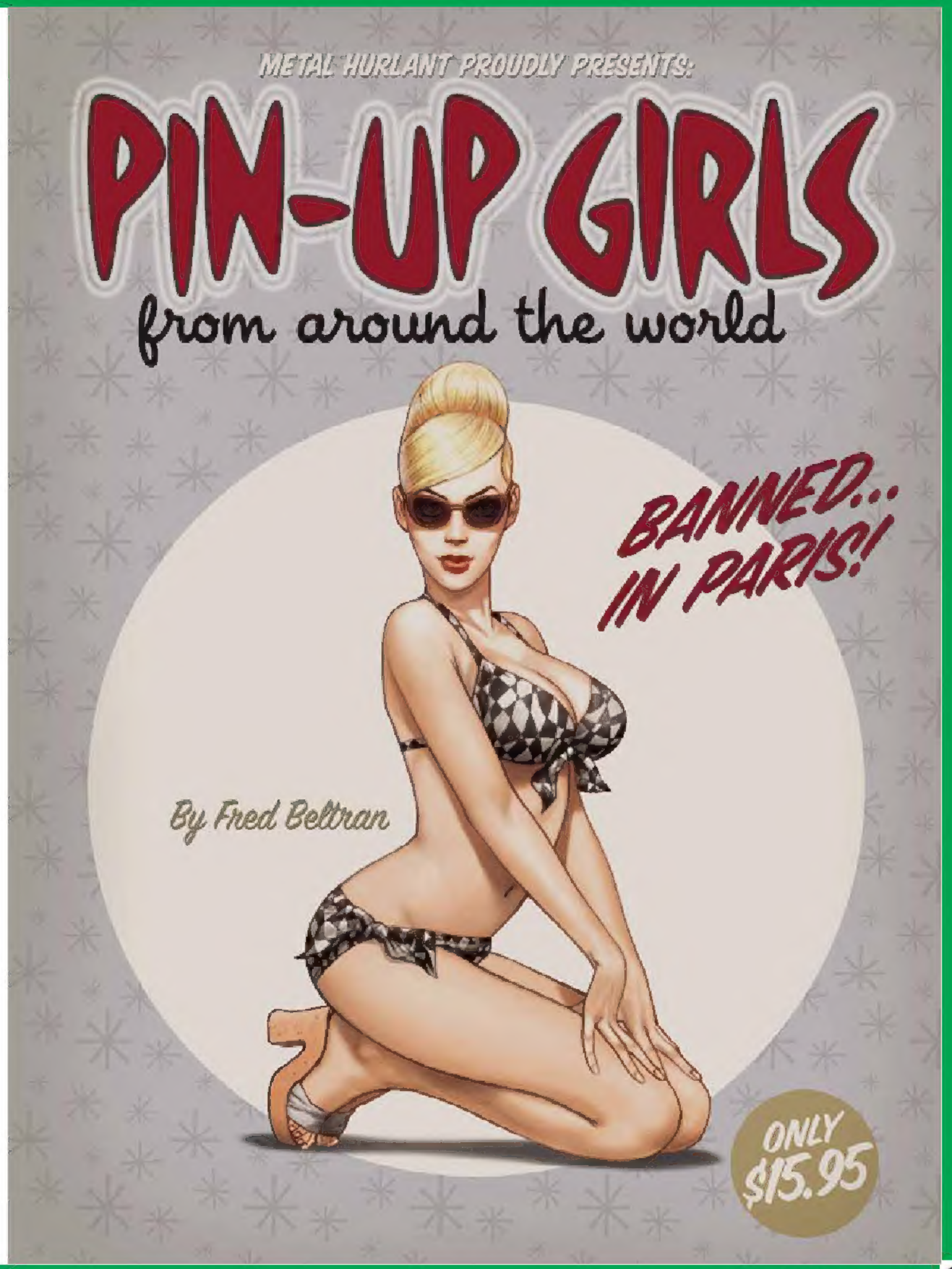
included writer/editor Jean-Pierre Dionnet and the illustrators Jean "Moebius" Giraud and Philippe Druillet. Influenced by both the US underground comix scene of the 1960s and the political and cultural upheavals of that decade, this "Association of Humanoids" set out to produce the kind of comic that they would want to read. What's more, they had a hidden agenda that was every bit as grandiose as their collective sobriquet; they were going to make people take comics seriously.

With a thematic emphasis on cerebral science fiction, visceral horror and heavy satire, **Métal Hurlant** was characterised by groundbreaking artistic innovation at every level. At first glance, the magazine itself looked quite unlike anything else on the market. The production and design values alone were unprecedented. In the beige world of the 70s, where cheap and nasty newsprint was still the medium of choice or necessity, **Métal Hurlant** was printed on "bedsheet" sized high grade glossy stock, giving artists the freedom to create lavish painted artwork that would have otherwise been impossible to produce. Robert Crumb and his underground cohorts might have influenced them, but these "Humanoids" were clearly not content with an underground look or an underground audience. They had the mainstream in their sights.

Under the watchful guidance of editor Dionnet, the creators - freed from the editorial constraints of traditional comics publishers - were given the leverage to go "one louder" in their storytelling and depiction of adult themes. Like the underground titles before them, they didn't shy away from graphic depictions of sex and violence, but more often than not these elements were shot through with a rich vein of Gallic humour coupled with a visual and narrative sophistication hitherto unseen in the medium. The first story that appeared in the title - a six-page sci-fi yarn by Moebius and Druillet entitled *Approaching Centauri* - typified the spirit of bold experimentation that would come to characterise the magazine. As Moebius later recalled: "My intention was to see if I could express the same quality of nightmarish visions that always seemed to come so naturally to Philippe. I even used the same extra-large format of paper that he uses for drawing his stories. At the same time, I wanted to retain my own style, and not copy him. In fact, I had the art of French illustrator Gustave Doré in mind when I started drawing the story".

The magazine was an instant success, and it wasn't long before other "Bandes Dessinées Pour Adultes" titles hit the racks, including **Fluide Glacial**, **(A Suivre)**, **Circus** and **L'Echo des Savanes**. In 1977 Les Humanoïdes Associés themselves produced a "sister" publication entitled **Ah! Nana**, devoted exclusively to female illustrators. Similar titles also began to appear in other European countries, often featuring **Métal Hurlant** reprints "dubbed" into the respective languages.

More than a decade before **Watchmen** and **Dark Knight** earned a temporary reprieve for comics in the English speaking world, **Métal Hurlant** had boldly asserted the maturity of the medium, and to more lasting effect. An "auteur" system rapidly developed, with comics creators earning the same kind of cultural esteem as novelists and film directors. Inspired by the legendary *Cahiers du Cinéma*, a "*Cahiers De La Bandes Dessinées*" was established, subjecting comics to the same kind of intellectual scrutiny as other art forms. University courses dedicated to the subject soon sprang up, and even the French government acknowledged its newfound legitimacy by funding huge



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comics museums and study centres like the CNBDI in Angoulême. By the time President Mitterand confessed he was an avid comics reader in 1985, the French considered it no more controversial or eccentric than admitting a fondness for opera, jazz or the films of Jerry Lewis.

The protagonist awakens to find himself transformed into a muscular giant in a strange, savage world full of dragons, manbeasts and women of ample proportions…

American and British comics fans, too, were becoming increasingly aware of **Métal Hurlant.** It was unique insofar as readers not fluent in French were quite happy to buy the magazine just to savour the experimental artwork and the adult themes expressed within its pages. Of course, the copious amount of fruity images probably helped as well; nudity has a tradition of dissolving language barriers.

It wasn't long before the publishers of American satire magazine **National Lampoon** saw the potential for exploiting this new adult comics market and, in 1977, they published **Heavy Metal** magazine, which - during its early years at least - devoted itself almost exclusively to translating material from **Métal Hurlant**. Utilising the same glossy format, it concentrated on the science fiction and fantasy stories at the expense of the satirical content which, it believed, didn't travel so well, and for many English speaking comics fans it was their first exposure to the European comics scene.

Before long other American publishers were imitating the format, albeit often with lamentable results. There was, however, one significant exception. In a recent interview with *CBR*, former Marvel Comics Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter revealed: "Before the publication of **Heavy Metal**, [Les Humanoïdes Associés] came to Marvel seeking an American publisher. After they did their presentation, we had a talk and Stan [Lee] thought that the stuff was too violent, too sexy and that good ol' sanitized Marvel couldn't do that." **Heavy Metal** turned out to be a major success, though, and that was enough to encourage a change of heart. In 1980, Marvel launched **Epic Illustrated**, which - whilst toning down the sexual content to broaden its appeal - was published in a similar format to its illustrious French counterpart and offered its creators a relative carte blanche. Uneven but occasionally brilliant, it featured stunning work from the likes of Frank Frazetta, Howard Chaykin, Neal Adams and **Hurlant** regular Richard Corben. Ironically enough, the Epic imprint later released a series of Moebius graphic novels containing the same **Métal Hurlant** material that Marvel had previously considered so objectionable.

More irony was to come. Back in France, things were not going well for **Métal Hurlant**. Sales suffered as rival publications increasingly went for the lowest common denominator, substituting a disproportionate use of fleshy tones in the now ubiquitous airbrush for the cerebral, satirical and experimental elements. In 1985 publishers Hachette acquired the title and Dionnet was promptly replaced as editor. A year later it changed hands again, but by this time the magazine was a pale imitation of its former self and the new management only delayed the inevitable. In August 1987 - just as "Comics grow up" headlines started appearing in the British and American press - **Métal Hurlant** folded.

In its twelve years of publication, **Métal Hurlant** did more than any other single publication to promote comics as a legitimate artform. Besides providing us with a wealth of classic material, it provided a blueprint for all subsequent attempts at "serious" comics and encouraged countless creators to aim higher. What's more, by being one of the first publications to actively collect serialised strips in a more durable album format, it even paved the way for the trade paperback system we all now take for granted. It's a considerable legacy.

But it doesn't end there.

A private eye and his beautiful client make love. The phone rings. It's a robocop, and it knows who the Arcturian spy is: "It's the girl!" Suddenly, she changes…

The full impact of **Métal Hurlant** extends far beyond the confines of the comics industry. Ridley Scott - director of *Alien* and *Blade Runner*, two of the most influential science fiction films of all time - was quite open about the debt he owed the magazine. In an interview published to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of *Alien*, Scott said: "In 1977 […] I came across the comics and publications born out of the **Métal Hurlant** magazines. In the same year, I was offered *Alien*, and I recognised the […] influences I could apply to the visual aspects of the film." For *Blade Runner*, Scott turned to the story **The Long Tomorrow** - a future-noir yarn by Dan O'Bannon and Moebius - to inform his seminal vision of a future Los Angeles.

Scott wasn't the only one to channel the magazine's spirit into another artistic form. William Gibson - the Godfather of Cyberpunk - admitted in a 1992

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interview: "I was having lunch with Ridley [Scott], and when the conversation turned to inspiration, we were both very clear about our debt to the **Métal Hurlant** school of the 70s - Moebius and the others." In an introduction to the comics adaptation of his novel **Neuromancer**, Gibson elaborated on this: "So it's entirely fair to say that the way **Neuromancer**-the-novel 'looks' was influenced by some of the artwork I saw in **Heavy Metal**. I assume this must also be true of John Carpenter's *Escape From New York* [...] and all other artefacts of the style sometimes dubbed 'cyberpunk'. Those French guys, they got their end in early."

These movies and books have effectively amplified the vision of **Métal Hurlant.** Not only have they inspired countless filmmakers and writers - and, for that matter, countless imitations - but the words and images they represent are now fully integrated into our language and popular imagination. Residual echoes of this can be found in the strangest of places: from music to video games, from the hi-tech exo-skeletal excess of the Lloyds Building in London to the Off-The-Shelf Futurist garments so ubiquitous in clubland, the influence is hard to avoid.

Like it or not, we are all Humanoids now.

Nu Metal

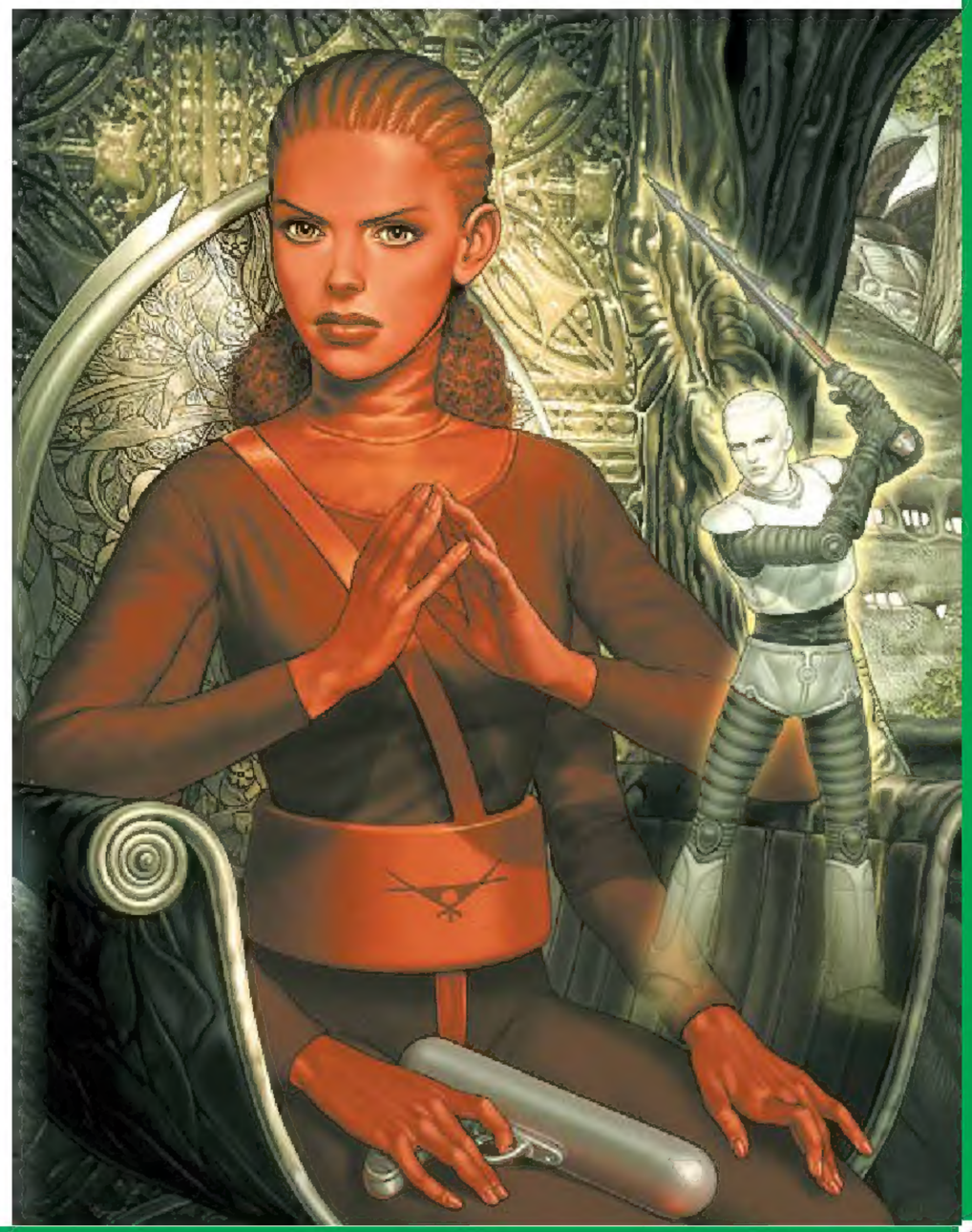
In this exclusive interview, Fabrice Giger - Chairman and Publisher of Humanoids - talks candidly to Borderline's Tom Lennon about the history of Métal Hurlant and the magazine's new incarnation.

Borderline: What was the catalyst for the original Métal Hurlant? Did the creators feel frustrated with the editorial constraints at Pilote and other magazines?

Fabrice Giger: It's true that some of the artists were frustrated, but the real catalyst was to create a magazine that they wanted to read, one that centered on their love of science fiction, which was their strength as creators. But the desire to create things that they loved was also extended past comic storytelling and into movies and literature. For example, Les Humanoïdes Associés became the first publisher in France to print the works of Charles Bukowski.

BL: Was there an official "Humanoids Manifesto" in the 70s? I've always had this romantic notion that linked the original Humanoids with the Surrealists in terms of their ambitious objectives and subsequent impact on society. Did they ever issue a mission statement that outlined their goals?

FG: There were no structured goals or direct ties. The Surrealists and the



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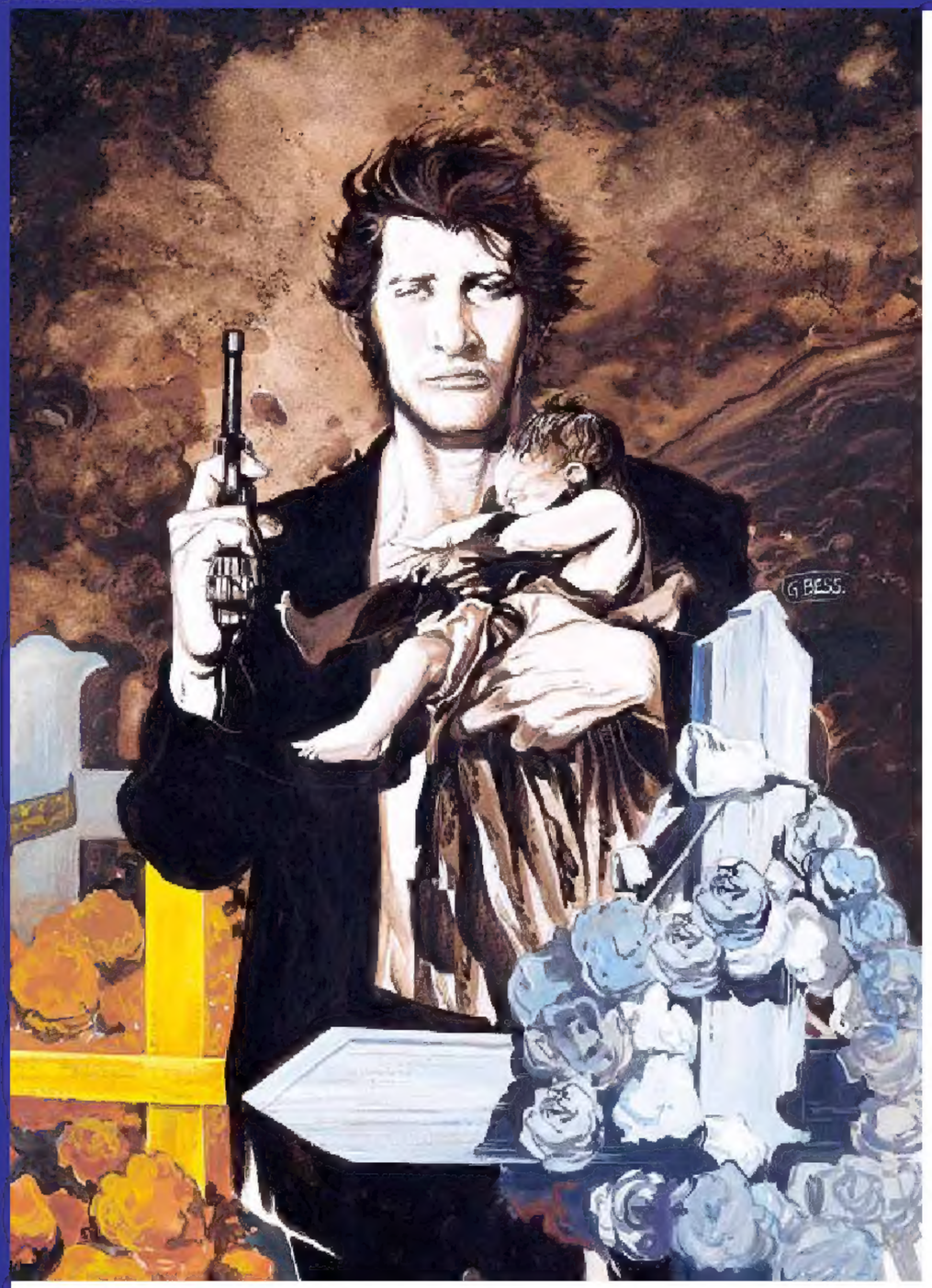

editors at Métal Hurlant were similar, though, in the fact that the magazine's editorials were often very opinionated commentaries on life in France, and often tackled hot button issues. For example, Métal Hurlant questioned why the sale of the book was prohibited to minors in France.

It's an interesting parallel because as we ready the new anthology, we're curious as to why we need content warnings for certain things in America. We understand why the rules are in place, and why they are there, but we are going to take a long hard look at how those rules are going to apply to Métal Hurlant.

BL: In an ad for the new magazine you say: "Métal Hurlant is the realization of Humanoids' vision to bring together the best storytellers from around the world to create a universal comics experience." Could you elaborate on this?

FG: Humanoids doesn't want to publish just "European" comics, or just "American" comics. Each region has its own style of storytelling, each with their own positives and negatives. At Humanoids it is our intent to mix the particularities of these cultures. To have people who don't usually work together, who don't speak the same language, starting to create together new universes and new stories. As artists and writers go through this experience, with a real freedom and pleasure to discover new ways to tell a story, they create a particular energy; we think that the audience feel this energy and enjoys the experience a lot more.

BL: Can you give me some insight into why you think the time is right for a new Métal Hurlant?

FG: One of the strengths of the new Métal Hurlant is that now, more than in the past, Humanoids has a very wide presence across several different countries. This allows not only a bigger audience, but also gives us the ability to draw from the considerable creative energies in both Europe and America. Specifically in terms of the States, we are just gaining the wider recognition we're after. More people in America know who we are, and that number is growing. The return of Métal Hurlant at this point will make a bigger impact because people won't get stuck wondering who the hell Humanoids is. And if we had waited much longer, Métal Hurlant might not have been able to add to our momentum as well.

BL: Looking back on the history of the magazine, is there anything you intend to do differently this time around?

FG: Everything! It's a strange coincidence, but the last issue of Métal Hurlant was released in July of 1987. The first issue of the new series will be released in July of 2002. It's going to have been exactly 15 years between series. A lot has changed in that time. Our format will be tweaked, and the stories will be different. The one thing that won't change, though, is the attitude and the vision. The title is meant to cultivate new talent and always push the envelope. In that sense, this Métal Hurlant will be just like its predecessor.

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HUMAN EMPIRE

An overview of The Humanoids Group, an association of partner and subsidiary companies bringing the cream of European comics talent to worldwide attention, across traditional media boundaries.

UNDER the leadership of founder and Chairman Fabrice Giger, The Humanoids Group of companies consists of:

PARTNER COMPANIES

Yeti Entertainment

Based in Geneva, Yeti Entertainment produces a range of games, from traditional card games to RPG (role-playing games) rule books and electronic games. Yeti began by producing interactive books for French publishers Gallimard and Hachette, and moved into card games. In the Spring of 2000, Yeti reorganised their business to enable them to diversify into animated series and electronic game licenses, forging a close working relationship with Humanoids at that time. Les Humanoïdes Associés licensed Yeti to produce a role-playing game derived from the graphic novel series **The Metabarons**, and another part of the group, Metal Hurlant Productions, is currently developing a television series based on Yeti's game and internet community, *Wee Web Witches*.

LBO Audiovisual Facilities

Corporate-speak describes LBO like this: "LBO provides a wide range of physical production services grouped in the same location to permit a vertically integrated response to the needs of its clients." What that means is that they combine a lot of allied technologies in-house, such as film and television publicity, post-production, digital visual effects, video/film transfer, digital production, soundstages, satellite transmissions, multimedia presentations and special events. Belgium's leading production facility, LBO was founded in 1983, adopting the name "Little Big One" in 1989 and operating from a state of the art 53,000 square foot pyramidal building. Notable projects include the *Devil's Mine* entertainment ride, which was composed entirely of digital imagery, and movies and TV shows shot using the emergent digital video technology.

Airtight Planet Inc.

Film director brothers Ridley and Tony Scott, in association with Renny Harlin, founded Airtight Planet Inc. with The Humanoids Group in 2000, and based it in Los Angeles, anticipating the coming convergence between television, cellphone and internet technologies.

SUBSIDIARY COMPANIES

West End Games

West End Games is a role-playing game design studio, most famous for games like the **1984**/**Brave New World** inspired satire *Paranoia*, and numerous games based on Hollywood blockbuster movies like *Star Wars*, *Ghostbusters* and *Men In Black*. Founded in 1974 specialising in military simulation board games, the immense popularity of role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons* led them to branch out in the mid-80s. At their height in the mid-90s, WEG were the third biggest games company. At the beginning of 2000, through the medium of a Los Angeles-based corporate shell company, D6Legend, WEG was integrated into The Humanoids Group, leading them to produce a line of licensed DC Universe role-playing games, and to collaborate with Yeti Entertainment on the *Metabarons* RPG.

Sparx*

In 1995 The Humanoids Group, Jean-Christophe Bernard and Guillaume Hellouin formed Sparx* as a 3D animation and digital special effects studio, working in TV, movies and commercials. Most notable projects would be the multiple award winners: *Peter and the Wolf* (1995); the credit sequence for Christophe Gans' *Crying Freeman* (1996), based on the famous manga; the dream sequences in Golden Globe winning film *My Life In Pink* (1997); *The Candlelight Circus*, Jerome Estienne's 3D feature film; 3D sequences for P. P. Renders' film *Thomas In Love*, designs conceptualized by Fred Beltran, a Les Humanoïdes Associés artist; and *Rolie Polie Olie*, a 3D animated Disney Channel series, for which Sparx* won an Emmy award. As one of the most technologically advanced studios in the world, Sparx* is expending great efforts to make sure that its animation will be able to be adapted to fit any emergent systems that may develop over the next years, expanding into electronic and on-line production, and developing Flash and other tools that complement its own software. Based in Paris, Sparx* opened a production facility in Vietnam in 1997 in order to keep

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costs to a reasonable level, and have recently formed a subsidiary called Sparkling.

Métal Hurlant Productions

Named after the legendary **Métal Hurlant** magazine, which ceased publication in 1987 but is about to make its return, Métal Hurlant Productions was formed in 1996 as the part of The Humanoids Group that deals with multimedia and audiovisual projects for the whole group. They have been responsible for CD-Roms based on Les Humanoïdes Associés titles by Enki Bilal and Milo Manara; provided assistance in the development of animated series such as *The Prince Of Atlantis* and *Tom & Sheenah*; arranged the financing of projects like *Roli Polie Olie*; co-produced the short film *Velvet99* and the recent feature film *Thomas In Love*, which won both the Critics' Prize at the Venice Film Festival and the Grand Prize at the Gerardmer Film Festival. Since the middle of 2000, Metal Hurlant Productions has been developing content for the internet, including an animated website for Yeti Entertainment's *Zoondo* game and Pegs net technology, and streaming comic books for Les Humanoïdes Associés and Airtight Planet. Currently in development are two animated series based on Yeti's *Wee Web Witches* and *Benito Mambo*, adapted from a Les Humanoïdes Associés book of the same name.

Mediapegs

For ten years, the 2D animation software Pegs has dominated the business across the world, installed on over 1500 workstations in leading animation studios responsible for eight full length features and over 1800 hours of serial television, such as MTV, Nickelodeon, Saban, Sony Wonder, Universal, Cine Group and Mike Young Productions. In 1996, the company responsible for Pegs, Mediapegs, joined The Humanoids Group, and began to intensively develop its technology to pull ahead of rivals Animo and US Animation, by simplifying the animation process for its customers. Although initially conceived for Unix, Pegs has now been integrated within the Windows platform. A recent breakthrough allows Pegs 3.1 a unique Flash capability to allow any Pegs animated movie or show to be broadcast through Flash players with no loss in quality. This enabled over a hundred animation studios to produce content for the World Wide Web overnight.

Les Humanoïdes Associés

The heart of The Humanoids Group is Les Humanoïdes Associés, established in the 1970s by Jean-Pierre Dionnet and artists such as Moebius and Druillet. Publishers of the original **Metal Hurlant** magazine, which served as the template for **Heavy Metal**, Les Humanoïdes Associés revolutionized the comics industry in Europe and later the world, with its collective of comic book luminaries including Bilal, Boucq, Ceppi, Gimenez, Jodorowsky, Manara, Margerin, Moebius, Schulten, Vicomte, Yslaire and others. In the late 80s the company had begun to languish; it was reinvigorated by Fabrice Giger and an influx of new blood including Beltran, Boiscommun, de Crecy, Dupuy and Berberian, Filippi, Lauffray, Wazem and many others. Les Humanoïdes Associés publishes its titles in France and then licenses the translation rights to publishers all over the world, including sister company Humanoids Publishing in the United States. Les Humanoïdes Associés is one of the most active publishers when it comes to adapting its catalogue to television and cinema, through the expertise of other members of The Humanoids Group.

Humanoids Inc.

Humanoids Inc. is the Los Angeles base of The Humanoids Group, established in 1998. It began by studying ways in which to best introduce the different activities across the whole Humanoids Group to the North American marketplace, and the first major initiative was to create Humanoids Publishing in order to make use of the wealth of French comics and graphic novels at their

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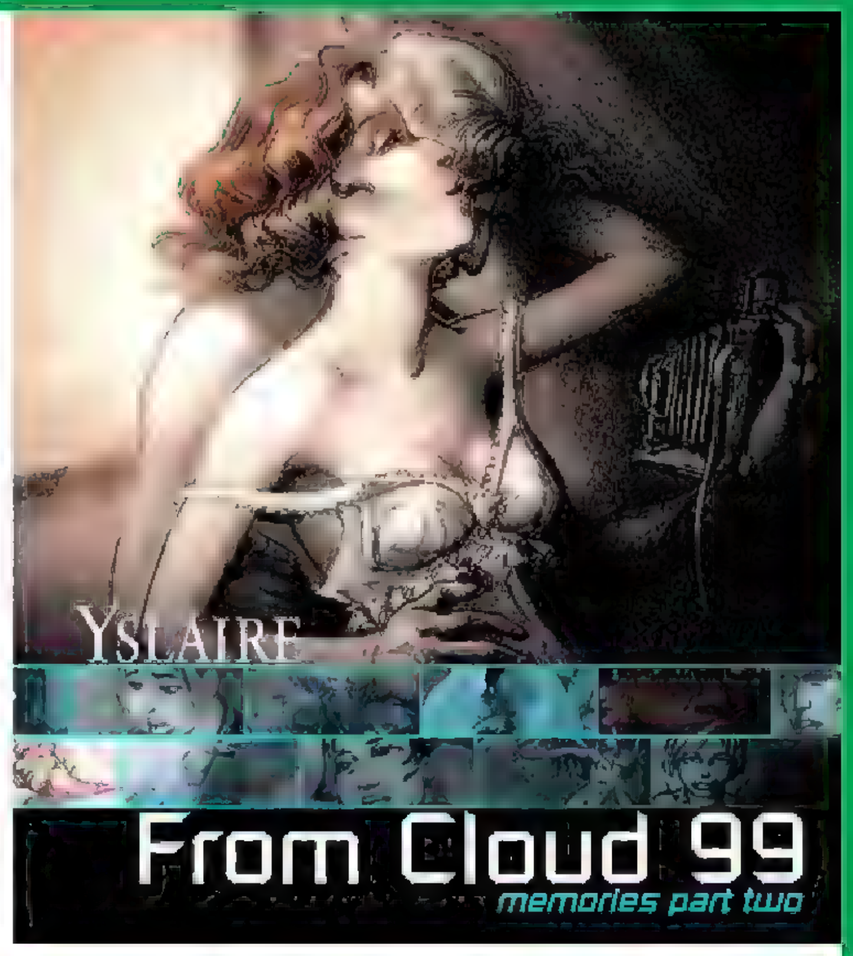
disposal. That job done, Humanoids Inc. now divides its time between commissioning screenplays, producing interactive content for the net, developing animated television projects and selling comic book rights to studios, networks and electronic game publishers.

Humanoids Publishing

Established in Los Angeles in 1999, Humanoids Publishing is The Humanoids Group's spearhead into the mainstream American comic industry, translating the French catalogue of Les Humanoïdes Associés into English and developing new properties utilising North American and British creators, to create a truly international fusion of comic styles. Fabrice Giger directly supervised the start-up of Humanoids, giving a strong indicator of how important it is to the future of the group. Humanoids' Publishing Director is Dave Olbrich, a veteran of comics publishing. Reception to the first wave of Humanoids Publishing titles, which appear in different forms depending on the material, as either European style hardback books or American style comic pamphlets, has been extremely good, with particular emphasis on **The Incal** and **The Metabarons** by Jodorowsky, Janjetov and Gimenez, and Yslaire's **From Cloud 99**. Response from North American creators who would like to work with Humanoids has been overwhelmingly enthusiastic. The latest stage of Humanoids Publishing came with the launch of a brand new website: *www.humanoids publishing.com*, which aims to be a one-stop shop for all things Humanoids related.



WIN! WIN! WIN! WIN! WIN!

1 of 50 free copies of Metabarons #1

Answer these five easy questions, send them in via e-mail or snail mail (address on page 2) by May 1st and we'll despatch them forthwith!

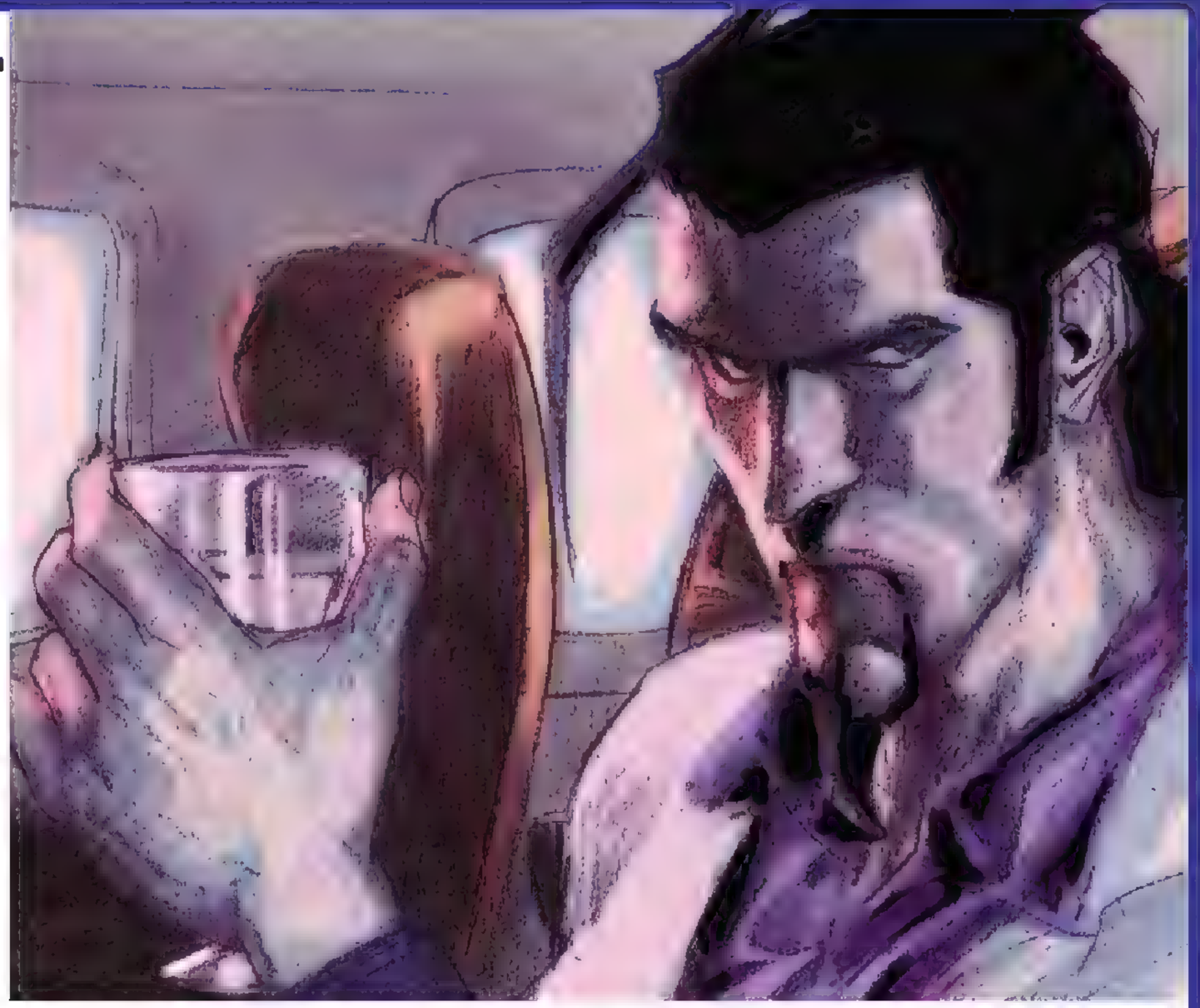
1. What is the name of Humanoids marketing director?
2. How many issues of The Incal have there been so far?
3. What is the name of the artist on Metabarons?
4. Which cult film director writes comics for Humanoids?
5. If there was one thing you could have featured in Borderline that isn't, what would it be?

editorial@borderline.mediahall.co.uk

WIN! WIN! WIN! WIN! WIN!

HUMAN SERVANT

Ian Sattler is the Marketing Manager for Humanoids Publishing. Borderline's Jay Eales took the opportunity to ask him a few questions about his job.



Borderline: What attracted you to come to work for Humanoids in the first place?
Ian Sattler: It was an interesting opportunity to work on bringing something different to comics in America. I also live in LA, which made commuting easier than when I lived in Washington.

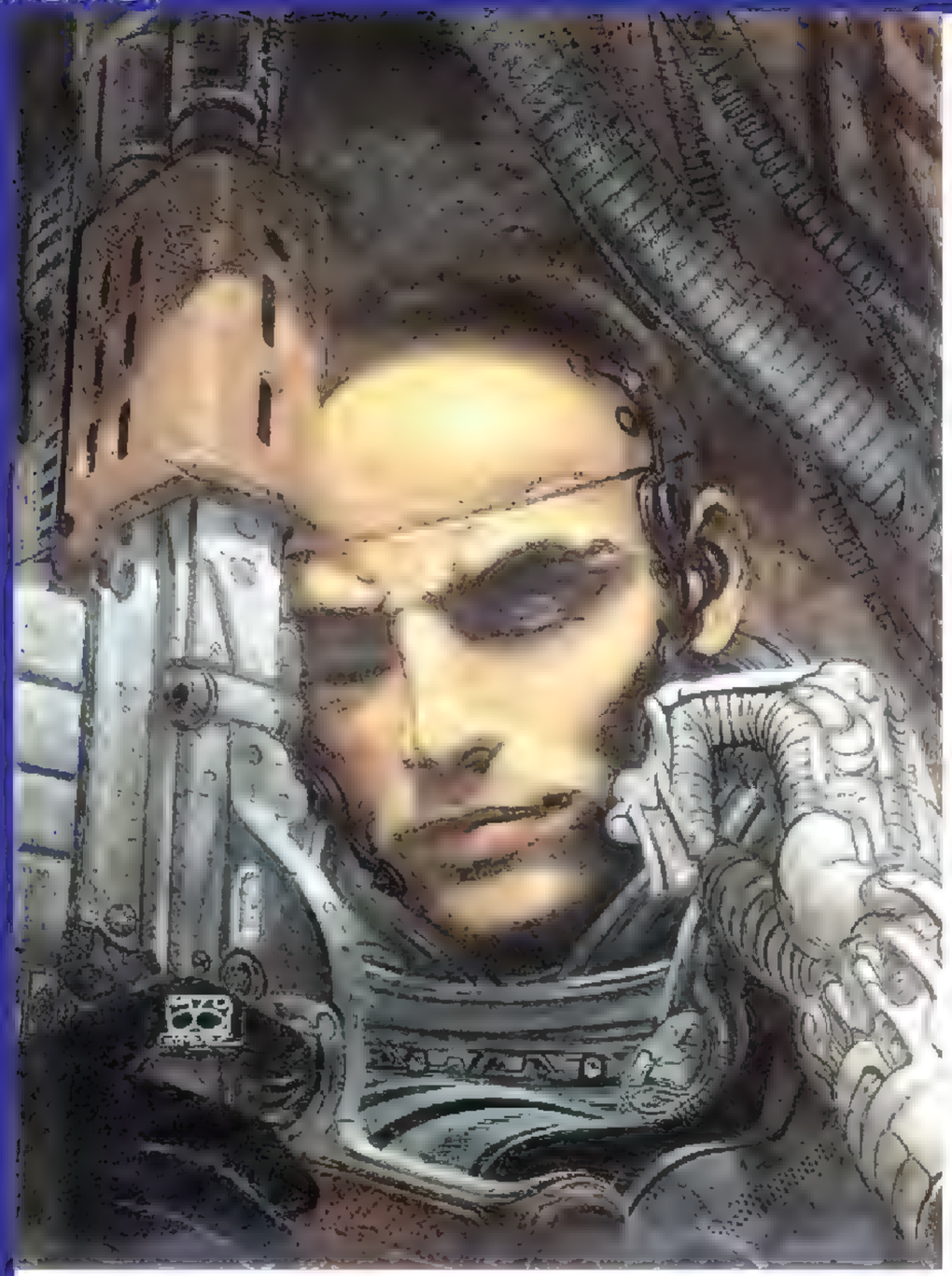
BL: What keeps you excited about your job?
IS: It's kind of the same answer. Every month we bring out a new book like Son Of The Gun or Miss, or The Beltran Pin-Up Book, or Negative Exposure and I get to tell everybody about it. It's exciting to see when these books start to find their audience, and people start talking about them. For me, that's the best part of the job, watching the books gain notoriety. That, and anytime somebody complains about how we cover up the nudity in Metabarons. I love that more than anything.

BL: Where do you see Humanoids' place in the comics industry? Do you have a ten year plan to storm the American marketplace?
IS: Humanoids is at the forefront of the growing trade paperback and graphic novel segment of the market. Our place is helping put something new in the hands of people who are picking up comics for the first time via trade paperbacks. We will continue to aggressively promote our format, and introduce as many new kinds of stories as possible. The plan is to succeed so well over the next five years, that ten years from now we have a whole new set of concerns to worry about, like how many copies of the Metabarons 15th anniversary collection to publish or how many more copies of the 6th Incal trade need to get sent to mass market bookstores, or how much nudity we can cover up in one of our books.

BL: The first issue of the new Metal Hurlant sees Humanoids' first published collaboration between the European and American disciplines, with the Kurt Busiek scripted and Gerald Parel illustrated werewolf tale, Hunter's Moon. This will be followed by the much-anticipated Dreamshifters project, teaming Alexandro Jodorowsky and Travis Charest. Is the intent to shift the focus of the company towards more original material, rather than repackaging the cream of European series for an English-speaking audience?
IS: There is no shift; it's all one big picture. We have an *amazing* back catalogue that most English-speaking fans have never read. Books like Son Of The Gun and Cloud 99 are new to them in a sense, and everybody really benefits from those books in our library expanding their print runs. On the other side of that coin, we are still a big publisher worldwide. We were never *not* doing new series and collaborations; these things just take time. Metal Hurlant was a long time in the making, and there is a lot more original material coming in the near future. By the way, I just want to say again that I think Gerald Parel's work in Metal Hurlant is freaking great.

BL: What would you say are the strengths of the American and European styles of comics storytelling?
IS: While I think there are some aspects of this question that are kind of universally agreed upon, it's really a matter of taste. For me, American comics have a really exciting sense of action and urgency. It's fast and exciting. On the other hand, the European style allows more time for things to take shape, and for the reader to get really immersed in the story. It's hard to say though; because in each style there are so many exceptions that it's kind of getting hard to keep track of the rules.

BL: Could you name a few creators whom you'd say had the sensibilities for the sort of material Humanoids want to publish?
IS: I think one of the things that's cool about the Humanoids library is that when you read one of our stories, you just know it's a Humanoids book. There is just this



intangible quality to the books we do. A feel. In that sense, I don't really see it so much as a creator's sensibility as much as it's the individual story that would have a Humanoids feel. You could take the one creator who has worked on very un-Humanoids books, and they could turn around and do a story that is very indicative of the Humanoids style. It just depends on what the specific story is.

BL: The Humanoids Group seems ideally set up to feed from one form to another, with comics, computer games, role-playing games and animated films. How closely does each company interact?
IS: Very closely. It is fully our intent to maximize the exposure of every one of our properties. We have a wide array of abilities across the different companies under the Humanoids banner, and we all cooperate every day to push the envelope forward.

BL: The US comic readership is notoriously conservative when it comes to the form it likes comics to be in. Is the American comics audience proving to be a hard sell with the European style albums, and if so, what are you doing to persuade people to give them a try?
IS: It is a hard sell, yes. But we are still early in the going, and I'm already seeing improvement. Sales are increasing at a good clip, and things like Cloud 99 getting 5 Eisner nominations is further proof of the growing acceptance for the format. It would have been naive not to expect it to take a good deal of time for the graphic album format to catch on. I remind myself all the time that there was a time when people thought trade paperbacks were a worthless prospect. The growth of that market not only gives us hope, but it is also linked to our increased sales as I really do think that the graphic album is a cousin of the trade paperback. In the meantime, we just try and put really engaging stories out like Exterminator 17 or the upcoming Ante Genesem and let the books speak for themselves. We've also been developing new promotional programs like our "10 For 90" incentive that allows retailers to sample 5 of our best-selling albums on a returnable basis during the summer. With that program in particular, each retailer gets two copies of the five albums for ten total. When you add up all the retailers that will be participating, that's a lot of albums placed into the market. I believe that it shows how committed we are to the graphic album format, and that we really think it will be able to generate sales for retailers.

BL: When people think of Humanoids, the two series which tend to get all the attention are The Incal and The Metabarons. The Incal was first translated into English in three volumes for Marvel's Epic Comics some years ago, but is only now being presented complete, with the prequel Before The Incal and the sequel, After The Incal, as an American-style comic book. The Metabarons takes one element of The Incal and develops it into a great saga, and has just won the 2001 Eagle Award for Best European Comic. But what would you say are the other Humanoids titles that are performing well for you?
IS: Everything in our library by Enki Bilal does great. Exterminator 17 just posted very high initial sales numbers, and that's a continuing pattern we have seen with his other stuff like Ship Of Stone and Memories From Outer Space. Add that to the strong and constant reorder activity on Nikopol Trilogy and Dormant Beast, and you have to see that Bilal has a very dedicated following. And that following is growing. Cloud 99 got a lot of attention in the States with the Eisner nominations, and that series is selling very well. Son Of The Gun is going to stay strong as the series progresses. And TechnoPriests is a juggernaut when it comes to back list sales. I'm glad that we just got TechnoPriests #1 back into print, because more people are waiting to read it. It is our goal to never let one of our albums stay out of print for too long.

BL: How do you see Humanoids developing in the future?
IS: More of everything. We're just starting to really grow. Métal Hurlant is going to be a serious event this summer. We've got some very diverse stuff coming out with the crime trade paperback, Miss, which is just going to astonish people. We've got the Pin-Up book from TechnoPriests artist Fred Beltran that is going to be like no other art book on the shelves today. The Moebius issues of Incal start with #13. And we've got some pretty serious surprises. We're not going anywhere. Trust me, we're just getting started. I'm having a hard time waiting for people to see some of the stuff that's coming because it's so cool. In the meantime, I'll just have to be content fielding questions about the missing nudity in Metabarons.

HUMANOIDS TIMELINE

1988 : Creation of Alpen Publishers editions;

1989: Purchase from group Hachette of the comic book/graphic novel publisher Les Humanoïdes Associés, created by Jean-Pierre Dionnet, Moebius and Druillet in 1974 around the Métal Hurlant magazine;

1990 : Purchase by Les Humanoïdes Associés of a part of the Editions Dargaud catalogue;

1993 : Partnership with a leading European pioneer of multimedia and digital images, the Belgian firm LBO;

1995 : Creation of the 3D Animation and digital special effects company Sparx*;

1995 : Creation of the film, television and digital production firm, Metal Hurlant Productions;

1996 : Purchase and re-launch of the development and marketing of the leading Pegs software, dedicated to the production of 2D animation, through the Mediapegs subsidiary;

1996 : Establishment of animation studios in Vietnam, through Sparx* Vietnam, for 3D animation, and Armada TMT for 2D;

1997 : Co-Founding of Chaman, a studio devoted to the development of online videogames. (This subsidiary was sold profitably in 1999);

1998 : Opening of a Los Angeles office representing the Group's activities in the US market;

1999 : Establishment in the USA of Humanoids Publishing to publish Les Humanoïdes Associés graphic novels in the United States as well as to develop English speaking talents;

2000 : Takeover of the American firm West End Games (D6Legend), creator of role- playing games and proprietor of the D6 game system. West End is the holder, among others, of the JDR DC Comics license (Batman, Superman, etc.);

2000 : Establishment of Sparkling, a Sparx* production subsidiary, co-producer of, among others, the *Rolie Polie Olie* series on The Disney Channel;

2000 : Partnership with directors Ridley Scott, Tony Scott and Renny Harlin, through the establishment of Airtight Planet Inc., a digital and new media production company;

2001 : Overtures to the universe developer and games creator, Yeti Entertainment;

Nearly 500 people work for Humanoids Group on three Continents, collaborating on stories and images and the technology that enhances them.

The Humanoids Group is owned jointly by Fabrice Giger and an investment fund managed by his long time partner, Nicolas Berggruen.

BL

Humanoids' comics to date

Title	*Publication Date*
Black Order Brigade	May 20 2000
Dusk #1	October 26 2000
From Cloud 99 #1	September 9 2000
From Cloud 99 #2	December 26 2000
The Incal #1	May 27 2001
The Incal #2	July 13 2001
The Incal #3	November 8 2001
The Incal #4	December 5 2001
The Incal #5	December 30 2001
The Incal #6	January 31 2002
The Incal #7	March 13 2002
Leo Roa #1	June 7 2000
Leo Roa #2	August 29 2000
Metabarons #1	January 16 2000
Metabarons #2	March 15 2000
Metabarons #3	April 26 2000
Metabarons #4	May 10 2000
Metabarons #5	June 7 2000
Metabarons #6	July 12 2000
Metabarons #7	August 2 2000
Metabarons #8	October 28 2000
Metabarons #9	January 4 2001
Metabarons #10	February 3 2001
Metabarons #11	March 14 2001
Metabarons #12	March 31 2001
Metabarons #13	June 15 2001
Metabarons #14	August 23 2001
Metabarons #15	March 13 2002
Metabarons tpb Vol 1	May 14 2001
Metabarons tpb Vol 2	February 3 2002
Negative Exposure #1	November 11 2001
Negative Exposure #2	December 7 2001
Negative Exposure #3	January 27 2002
Negative Exposure #4	March 20 2002
Son Of The Gun #1: Born In The Trash	December 28 2001
The Book of Jack	September 2 2000
The Dormant Beast	March 8 2000
The Fourth Power	September 2 2000
The Hollow Grounds: Carapace	July 29 2001
The Hollow Grounds: Nogegon	January 4 2001
The Hollow Grounds: Zara	August 15 2001
The Hunting Party	April 12 2000
The Nikopol Trilogy	February 5 2000
The Technopriests Book 1	February 5 2000
The Technopriests Book 2	December 23 2000
The Technopriests Book 3	April 14 2001
The White Lama Vol 1	April 12 2000
The White Lama Vol 2	May 20 2000
The White Lama Vol 3	September 2 2000
The White Lama Vol 4	October 26 2000
The White Lama Vol 5	December 23 2000
The White Lama Vol 6	March 31 2001
The Town That Didn't Exist	September 6 2001

MYSTERY – THE DREDD PLAYS

Thrill power unleashed... Audio Judge Dredd? Are they mad? Or is it gonna make your day?

AT the beginning of April, Big Finish Productions unveils the first of a new range of audio plays based on some of **2000AD**'s most famous characters. Kicking off with Mega City 1's finest, *Judge Dredd: Wanted: Dredd Or Alive*, written by former **2000AD** and **Judge Dredd: The Megazine** editor, David Bishop, the plan is to release a new play on CD every month. Big Finish are best known for their range of *Doctor Who* audio plays featuring the likes of Peter Davison, Colin Baker, Sylvester McCoy and Paul McGann, plus a host of other actors from the television series reprising their roles. The new Big Finish website, *www.bigfinish.com*, should be online imminently.

This is not the first time that Judge Dredd has appeared outside his native medium. Coinciding with the poorly received *Judge Dredd* movie starring Sylvester Stallone, Virgin Books released a number of novels, and even BBC Radio One got in on the act with two dramatisations of classic Dredd stories, broadcast in five minute instalments over a number of weeks. However, Big Finish has decided to go for wholly original stories, written to take advantage of the audio medium. But that's not all; after the initial two Dredd stories, both penned by Bishop, comes the first audio appearance of another John Wagner and Carlos Ezquerra creation - Johnny Alpha, aka **Strontium Dog**, portrayed by actor/ writer/comedian and long-term **2000AD** fan, Simon Pegg, co-author and star of the TV series *Spaced*. **Strontium Dog: Down To Earth** is written by anime authority and former editor of *Manga Max* Jonathan Clements, who we'll be focusing on in a future issue of **Borderline**. A little later in the year comes another Dredd story, provisionally titled *The Floating Game*, by Dave Stone; and the debut of the third ongoing character in the **2000AD** stable with *Rogue Trooper: Nordland Calling* by **2000AD** and **Warhammer Monthly** stalwart, Gordon Rennie.

Borderline took the opportunity to talk to some of the writers about their involvement in the range. David Bishop leads off the series, and so we spoke to him first: "In November last year I was approached by John Ainsworth [Big Finish Producer of the **2000AD** Range] to see if I would be interested in writing the first script for the **2000 AD** audio adventures. I had met John a few times many years ago and already knew that Big Finish had been very successful with their *Doctor Who* audios, so I said yes. I wrote three of the nine Judge Dredd novels published by Virgin in the early 1990s and had edited both **2000 AD** and the **Judge Dredd Megazine** for spells over the past twelve years, so I've got a fair knowledge of Old Stony Face and his world. John's approach came just as I was concluding my time as freelance editor of the **Megazine** and trying to build a career as a writer, so it was well timed for me. I pitched three ideas for Dredd audios to John and Nick and they liked them all, which was nice. They asked me to develop *Wanted: Dredd Or Alive* as the first script. I wrote that in December 2001 and then there were various tweaks and polishes to get it just right and approved by Rebellion."

Bishop continued, "I went to the recording in London on Sunday, January 27, which proved very illuminating, seeing what worked and what didn't in the studio. Since then I've written my second Dredd audio, *Death Trap*, and have another commissioned, [provisionally entitled *Auteur! Auteur!*], which I'll be writing in March. I can't tell you much about the stories themselves due to contractual obligations - Big Finish likes to keep plots a secret so listeners can enjoy stories without knowing every detail in advance - something I applaud in an age where armchair critics (like me!) slag off comics three months before they are even published after reading the plot synopsis in Diamond's *Previews*. Dredd is amazingly well suited to audio, as the BBC proved when it adapted two old mega-epics as radio serials in 1995. Those won awards and one cracked the Top 75 album charts at the time, so I think Big Finish are on to a good thing. Better still, all their stories are all new, rather than just doing predictable adaptations. It's a new medium for me, which is exciting after working in journalism, writing non-fiction books, novels and comic strips. As well as the two Dredds, I've also just written

a *Doctor Who* spin-off audio for Big Finish. My future plans: I've got a *Doctor Who* novel called **Amorality Tale** out from the BBC in April, and am writing another Who novel called **The Domino Effect** for the BBC right now - that's out in November. Reynolds and Hearn is publishing **The Complete Inspector Morse**, my definitive guide to the novels and TV series - that's out in May. I've written three issues of **The Phantom** comic for Egmont Sweden. The first came out at Christmas in Sweden and has been reprinted in English in Australia by Frew Comics. My unofficial guide to the TV crime drama *The Sopranos* is on sale now, published by Virgin - it's called *Bright Lights, Baked Ziti*. Erm, what else? My regular column in **Comics International**, which seems to get up the noses of certain **Borderline** scribes! And sundry other projects in development."

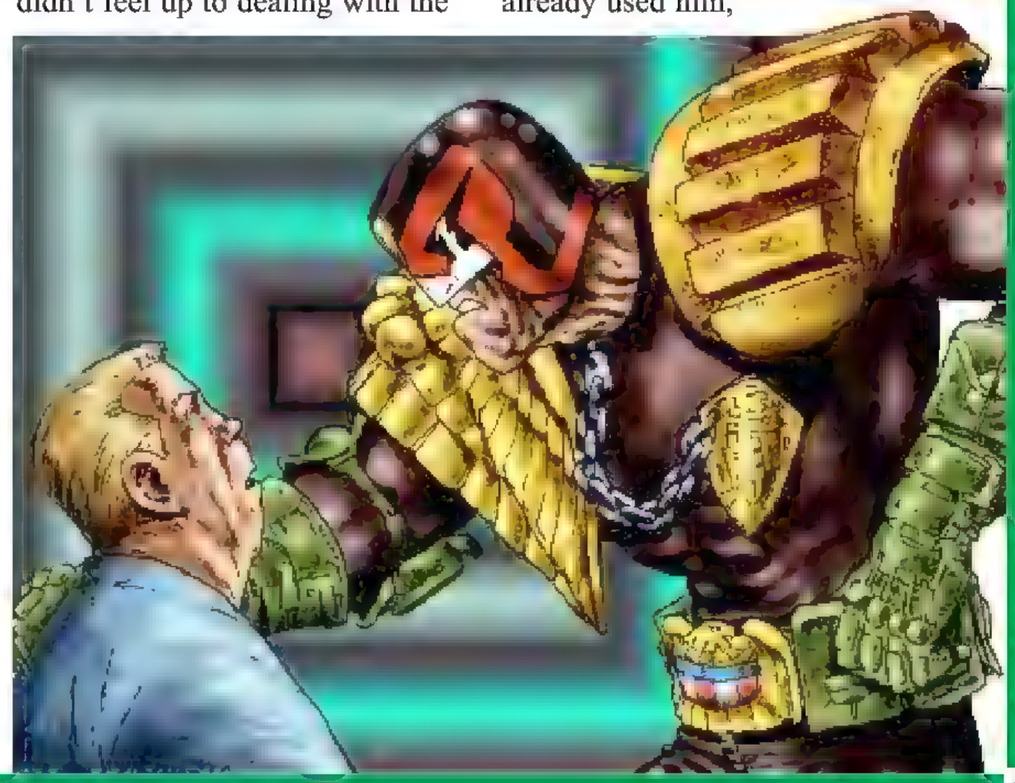
No stranger to the worlds of Judge Dredd and Doctor Who, author and comics writer Dave Stone is possibly the best tour guide on the "rubber ricochet" route that brought Joe Dredd from the printed page to shiny CD. **Borderline** took the opportunity to ask Stone about the way his path seems to keep crossing that of Mega City 1's finest lawman: "Basically, the way I got into doing a Dredd audio was pure karma - what goes around, comes around. I started out doing comics, and what with one thing and another lucked into a Dredd-related series for Fleetway, as it was then, on pretty much the first go. That was a bit unfortunate on a personal level, looking back, because it was the highest stratum you could reach in the UK, career-wise, and it all went a bit to my head - rather like the time I was writing games for the ZX Spectrum, just before that particular bubble burst, and I didn't worry about how much money I was sticking up my arm because I thought there'd always be more money. And, rather like the way I never learned to program anything other than a Spectrum, I never made that big comics leap to America - mostly 'cause of broadcasting the kind of unthinking arrogance and superiority that puts Americans and everybody else right off. Or it might have been my habit of getting outside of several boilermakers at conventions, jumping on tables, calling everybody a bunch of, er, idiots, and falling over.

"Anyhow, I came into British comics pretty much at the top, and after I'd insulted so many people

there that they wouldn't hire my dog, I had nowhere else to go. Fortunately, while working for the Detective Judge *Armitage* series, I'd more or less invented and defined the Brit-cit area of the Dredd world. Virgin Books were starting up a Dredd line of their own, and wanted a novel set in Brit-cit. I had the skills, I had the inside gen, and crucially, I was willing to work for the money on offer. This was just before the movie, you understand. We all thought we were hitching our wagons to a franchise. We thought we were all of us going to be farting through silk. And then the movie came out. I've said this before, and I'll say it again: I really liked the *Dredd* movie - right until that shot, two minutes in, of my entire livelihood flying away on little wings.

"The only people I was on remotely friendly terms with, by this time, were the Virgin guys, and Virgin were doing **Doctor Who**. So I got a couple of videos out of the local library - *Castrovalva* and *Vengeance on Varos*, I think - made a few notes and just started proposing. People sometimes seem to think there's a kind of magic involved in Getting Published, but the truth is as simple and prosaic as that: get an idea, propose it, get commissioned and then write the damn thing. So things were ticking over okay, creatively if not financially - until Another Bloody Movie [*Doctor Who: The TV Movie*] hove into view. Again, people thought they were gonna be dealing with a franchise. The BBC clawed back the *Doctor Who* rights and gave them to the children's publishing department, who thought it would be a doddle putting out something like twenty full-length novels a year... Things settled down later, of course, and I eventually did a couple of books for the BBC line, but at the time I could see the way things were going, and simply didn't feel up to dealing with the desperation, chaos and compromises to official-sounding pressure. The Virgin books were carrying on as a kinda generically SF shared world, and I stuck with them for the simple reason of creative freedom and integrity, the fact that I had some say in how that shared world developed. Up until the last one, anyway. Don't get me started. The point is that the Virgin books ended up being killed by the accountants. They had a small but loyal fan-base, and they were making enough money to keep on going... but they weren't making much actual profit. So the bean counters killed them. This left a whole raft of stuff out there, waiting to be picked up by somebody who was primarily into doing things for the love. Step in Big Finish.

"Long story short: Big Finish wanted to use a character I invented, Jason Kane, in a continuation of the novels. They'd already used him,



but they only had the audio rights. I said yeah, on the tacit understanding that I was gonna be the one to bring him back. This allowed me to correct some of the more hideous distortions that have plagued the guy over the years, and bring him back something like to true. Sadly, though, it seems that the BF novels are now going to be an occasional thing at most - the production overheads for a small-scale publication are *way* out of proportion to those of a mass-market paperback; the audio format is simply more cost effective. Besides, audio is just one hell of a lot more fun. I was doing the first draft of my PROBE script [a Doctor Who spin-off, very much in the *X-Files* vein, featuring old Jon Pertwee companion Liz Shaw, reprised by Caroline John] for BBV [rival producers of science fiction and horror audio plays and movies] a few months back, and I was suddenly hit by how much I'd missed the script form, the sense of immediacy to the characters and story, and I realised that I was sick of slogging out 80,000 words a time and that *this* was what I wanted to do. I'd long wanted to do one of the BF Benny audios, but I had this complete mental block about it, if you get what I mean; I just couldn't get my head around where or how to start.

"Then I had this drunken conversation with Gary Russell [Producer of Big Finish's *Doctor Who* range], at the Fitzroy Tavern [regular meeting-place for London's Doctor Who fandom] - well, I say 'with', but it was probably *at*. I was moaning about certain things that were happening with my life, the details of which are neither here nor there, but because we were more or less on the same page about the fictional lives of Professor Bernice Summerfield, Jason Kane and so forth, I was talking about the stuff in those terms: 'Look, suppose Jason came home, right, and found Benny doing such and such,' and so on. Then I woke up the next morning and completely forgot about it, until a few days later when I got a Memorandum of Agreement and a cheque through the post. I'd proposed an audio without realising I was doing it. I then completely forgot about it again, involved as I was with the *Telos* novella, [a licensed range of hardback Doctor Who novellas, penned by the likes of author/ critic Kim Newman and fantasy author Tom Arden], until I got a slightly frantic email asking where the script was. Don't tell anyone, but that's actually my working process - get yourself into the situation where if you don't blast it out, and blast it out *now*, then you're gonna have to pay back the advance. Taping the gas bill to the wall behind the computer also helps. So, anyway, I got it in, and it seemed to go down okay, 'cause in the next few days I got a mail from John, asking me if I'd like to submit for the BF **2000AD** line. I suppose you might call that pure luck, or being in the right place at the right time - but take it from me, if you hang around anywhere for long enough, the right time has to come around occasionally by the law of averages. So that's the long answer. The short answer is: I was doing Dredd-related stuff for people who were also doing *Doctor Who*, so then I did Who stuff, and then I found that I was doing Who-related stuff for people who were also doing *Judge Dredd*. What goes around comes around."

Stone continued: "As for the thing itself, I don't wanna give too much away because, on paper, it doesn't sound that impressive: Judge Dredd gets into a big fight in a killing maze and shoots a bunch of people. It's like saying that there's this High School kid who kills vampires, or that a bunch of people take this ring to a hole, drop it in and go home - stated so baldly it all sounds a little bit naff. The trick is drawing on the sheer wealth of material, the decades of Dredd-world history that can't result in anything other than an overwhelming density of content - even the throwaway gags have a depth of significance behind them. Rather like Who, come to think of it, we're standing on the topmost shoulders of this whole human pyramid of giants, all those great creators who over the years have built this dense and complex structure from which we can see to the ends of the world... Mind you, I've also got a *Rogue Trooper* proposal in the works."

Coming soon: Your chance to win copies of Big Finish's *2000AD Audio Dramas*, and an interview with the author of Strontium Dog: Down To Earth, Jonathan Clements, with a report from the studio recording.

2000AD Audios Release Schedule

Judge Dredd: Wanted, Dredd or Alive by David Bishop – 2nd April 2002
Judge Dredd: Death Trap by David Bishop – 29th April 2002
Strontium Dog: Down To Earth by Jonathan Clements – 4th June 2002
Judge Dredd: The Killing Game (title tbc) by Dave Stone – 1st July 2002
Rogue Trooper: Nordland Calling by Gordon Rennie – 5th August 2002
Judge Dredd: Auteur! Auteur! (title tbc) by David Bishop – 2nd September 2002

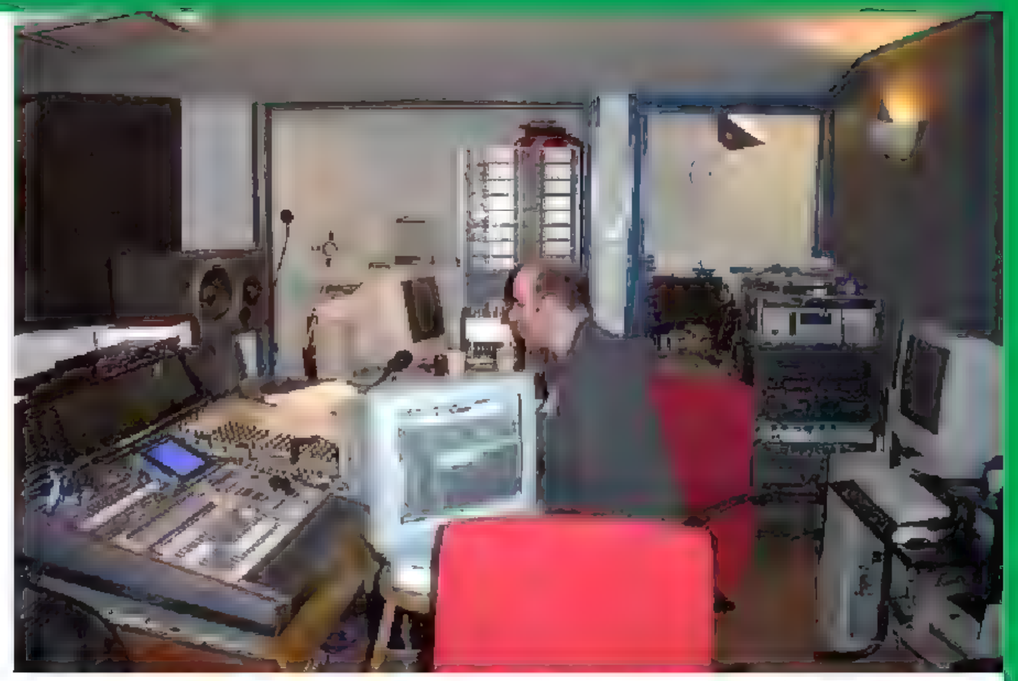
Further releases to be announced.

DEATH STALKS SOUTH LONDON

ON Sunday March 24, the cast and crew of Big Finish's new 2000AD-based audio dramas assembled in South London to record the second Judge Dredd audio: *Judge Dredd: Death Trap*. Reprising their roles from the first audio were: Toby Longworth as Judge Dredd, Claire Buckfield as Judge Steel, Regina Regan as Enigma Smith and Jeremy James as Control. Borderline was there to discover how the ultimate lawman would translate from printed page to audio CD.

Toby Longworth is an actor and impressionist who has worked as voice talent on a number of projects - including Dirk Maggs' *Independence Day UK* and a certain George Lucas' *Star Wars I: The Phantom Menace* - and heard the part of Dredd was coming up while working with Big Finish on some of their *Doctor Who* audios. He asked to be given an audition for the part and was approved by Rebellion as a suitable voice for their legendary lawman. Series producer John Ainsworth explained: "Dredd is quite one dimensional - he tends not to get over-emotional about things. So, we needed to find someone who could be true to the character but also bring some subtle variation to it as well. We didn't want Dredd to be just a boring monotone American voice who occasionally shouts. We think Toby has managed to capture this perfectly." Longworth was already familiar with Dredd, having bought 2000AD and sister magazine Starlord from the beginning, and has kept in touch with his exploits through the years. When he saw the Hollywood movie, he felt that Dredd should be someone more like Clint Eastwood or David Carradine; definitely not Sylvester Stallone! So when it was time for him to give Dredd a voice, he aimed for something with Eastwood's strength and menace but with Bruce Willis' straight-talking volume.

Playing Dredd's nemesis Judge Death in *Death Trap* is Mark Gatiss from *The League of Gentlemen*. Affirming fond memories of Action, a precursor to 2000AD which was actually banned from newsagents for its graphic scenes of violence, Gatiss admits he never bought 2000AD but read his brother's copy, and has memories of Judge Death and his brother Dark Judges, Fear, Fire and Mortis. He confesses a love of the supernatural, and while the majority of Dredd's adventures failed to grasp his attention, this ethereal Judge from an alternate dimension, where all life has been declared a crime, stuck in his memory. Having worked previously with Big Finish as a writer, director and actor, he heard they were working on Judge Dredd audios, and that Judge Death would be in one of them, so he asked if he could play the part. Gatiss hisses into the microphone, and explains that he sees Death as having a voice akin to Hugo Drax (played by Michael Lonsdale) in the James Bond film *Moonraker* - a soft and very menacing tone, completely in control and confident in his abilities. Asking him about other comics favourites, he cites Alan Moore, especially Watchmen, and also

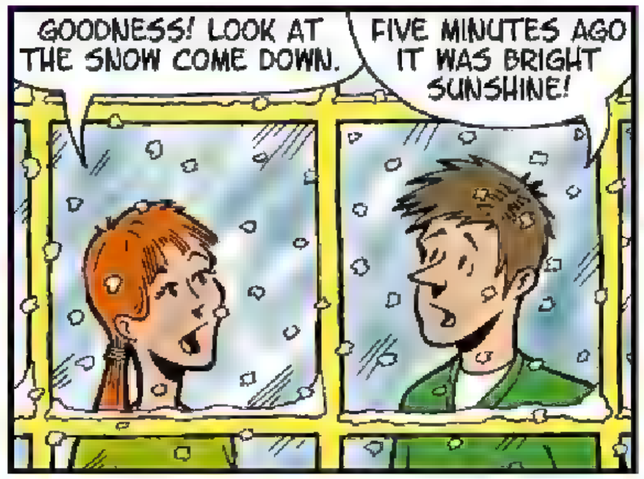


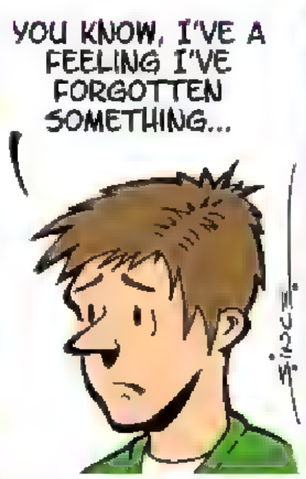
Dark Knight Returns as some of the few he has read. He doesn't have time to do more than read those which are highly recommended, with a busy schedule that includes starting filming the third series of The League of Gentlemen in mid-April, and perhaps appearing on stage in the West End. He does note that as *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* is now being cast, he should go for a part in that, purely because of the similarity between the titles of his and Moore's work.

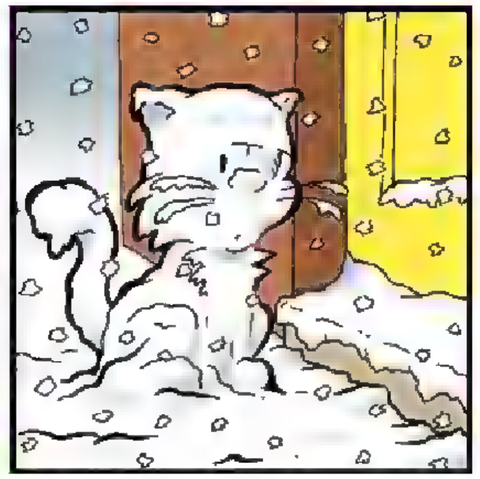
The process of recording the plays is quite snappy; with only one day's recording, and over 60 scenes to get through, there is only time for one rehearsal. Then, after a few comments from director Nicholas Briggs, it's time to record the scene. Afterward, small parts are re-recorded - something where audio has a great advantage over TV, since it is possible to break scenes up substantially if the majority is fine and only a small part is unacceptable, e.g. because of a rattling script being picked up by the microphones.

How had Big Finish ended up bringing 2000AD to CD? Series Producer John Ainsworth revealed all: "We'd had a lot of success with our series of *Doctor Who* audio dramas and we felt that 2000AD had a wealth of characters and situations that would make great audio dramas in a similar way. Like *Doctor Who*, 2000AD also has a dedicated and intelligent audience who, we hope, will be receptive to the idea of enjoying familiar characters in a new medium. We approached Rebellion with the idea and they were immediately receptive and enthusiastic." If the initial six plays are successful, John certainly plans more. He would like to try other 2000AD characters at some point, and explore other areas of Dredd's world, citing the rebuilding of Mega-City 2, Occult investigator Devlin Waugh, and a trip to the Japan of the future, Hondo-Cit, as possible areas which could be brought to audio in the future. BL

SINCERITY







CHANCES are, you've not heard of Steve Ince, unless you're a groupie for computer games companies, a reader of his (former) local newspaper, or if you're one of the growing number of people who've discovered Juniper Crescent, an online newspaper style strip featuring a cat with an eyepatch, named Scout, and a cast of hundreds.

I'll confess my own connection to Steve, here and now. Back in 1994, I read an advertisement in the back of Comics International, much like many others over the years, from someone wishing to publish their own comic and looking for writers and artists. The publisher was House Atreides Publishing (HAP), and the catchphrase was "Tomorrow's Stars. Today." Fancying myself as the next Alan Moore, I gave HAP a ring and pitched a few ideas, which were well received, and I was promptly teamed up with an artist called Kelvin Cox, fresh from a tour of duty with another small press publisher, CM Comics, where he'd drawn a title called Wild Card. The plan was that we'd do a series of six page back-up strips which would appear in HAP's second title, The Amazon, before graduating to a title of our own. I saw some samples of art from The Amazon's first issue, and they were drawn by none other than Steve Ince. I was impressed, I have to say. I began to get distinctly good vibes towards the whole project, and got a bit carried away with forward planning for MageWorks, the title that Kelvin Cox and I were working on. I believe I had mapped out about five years of storylines, and eight or nine scripts, plus numerous one-shots for the supporting cast, while Kelvin worked on the first three we'd been commissioned for. Plans were drawn up for issue four of The Amazon to be a full-length story where The Amazon and my character, Narcisse, teamed up, which Steve would illustrate. So, we struck up a telephone friendship, which has endured, on and off for the last few years. The crunch came when HAP unveiled its premiere title, written by the publisher himself (aren't they always?) and illustrated by a troupe of badly trained gerbils with Parkinson's Disease (as near as I could tell...) Naturally, Rogue's Warriors issue #1 was to be the final curtain for House Atreides, summed up quite neatly by what Our Beloved Editor hereabouts, at every available opportunity, describes as the best review he ever wrote for Comics International. We were all crushed, at the time. I suppose that Kelvin and Steve thought they were hardest done by, having spent all those hours slaving to produce all those pages which would remain unpublished to this day, but I know it was me who suffered most, because I bought ten of the things, with the intent of convincing friends to buy them! I kept my friends, but that meant also keeping the comics... M. R James wrote a story called *Casting the Runes*, adapted for the screen as *Night of the Demon*, in which it was possible to curse a man to being claimed by a demon if you could get them to willingly accept a piece of paper, upon which the runic curse was written. In the film, the hero spends a great deal of the film attempting to get the evil sorcerer to take back the paper and save his soul. He succeeds in the end, by the way. If only I were so fortunate.

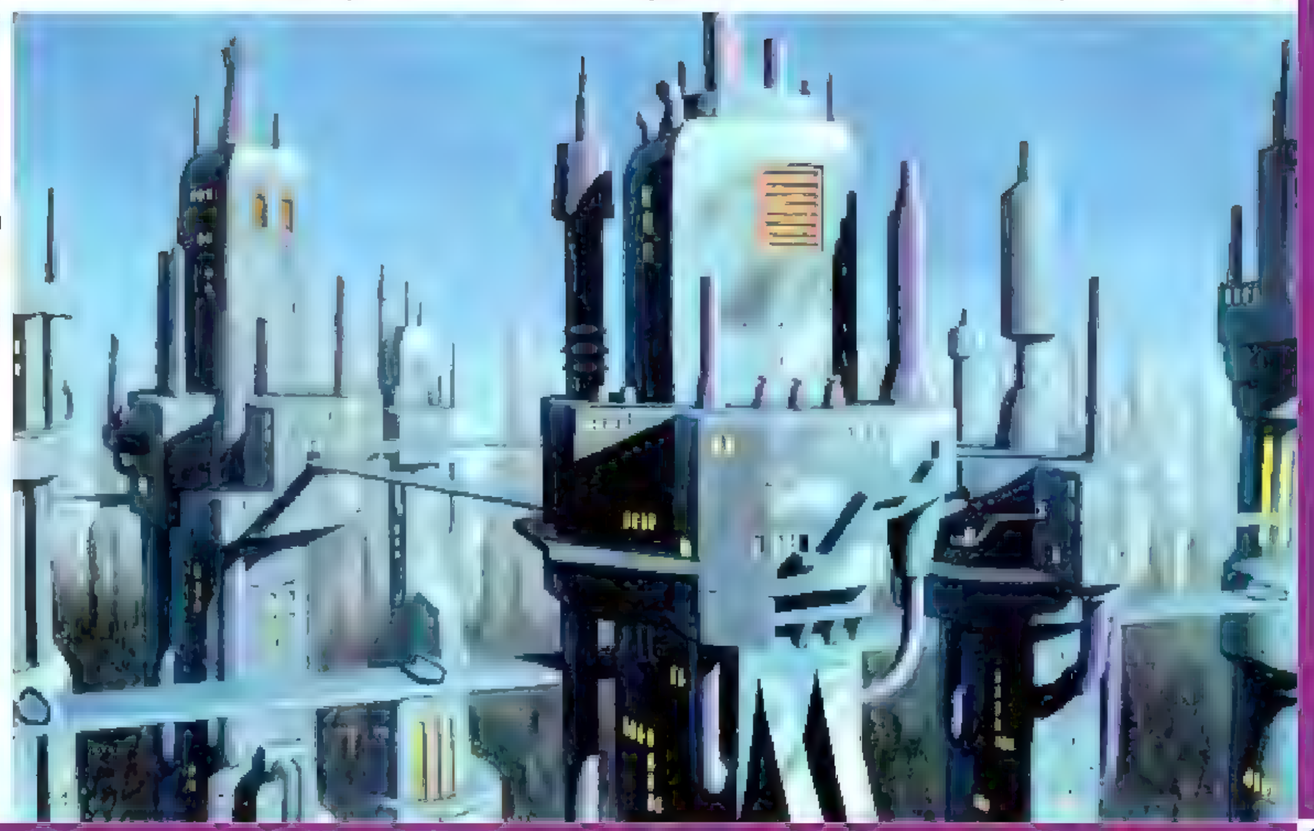
I apologise unreservedly for dredging up this little tale, and for reminding Steve about the whole sorry affair in preparation for this feature, which prompted him to say: "House Atreides - I'd forgotten that name just about altogether. The thing I remember most was how bad their first publication was, after [Darren Smithson] had me convinced that the artist he was working with on that title was top notch. I had no hesitation but to disassociate myself from them altogether, and refused to allow him to publish The Amazon. (I'm sure he could have gone ahead and done it anyway, and I was surprised he didn't.) I was so

annoyed that he lumped my art in the same category as this other guy's. I don't class myself as a great artist by any means (good, but not great), but I felt really insulted. The strangest part was that I actually enjoyed drawing The Amazon, and whilst the writing was a bit cheesy, I hoped it would get better. However, when I got the script for the second issue, I wrote back to Darren and told him I couldn't draw it as it stood. This was before the launch title came out, of course. Ah well..."

In all the time I've known him, Steve has worked for the computer games developer, Revolution *[www.revolution.co.uk]*, where he was involved in major computer game success stories such as *Beneath A Steel Sky* and the *Broken Sword* trilogy. *Steel Sky* will be of particular interest to comics readers, because of the extensive involvement of Dave Gibbons in the project. As Steve recalls: "Dave Gibbons was involved with Revolution before I joined the company and had come into contact with them through Revolution's publisher, Virgin. Dave designed most of the characters, sketched the backgrounds and contributed to the story development of *Beneath A Steel Sky*. And of course, he drew the eight page comic that came with the original version of the game, and which I thought was one of his finest pieces at that point. I became involved with Revolution when I happened to find out they were looking for someone who could paint backgrounds. I did a test based on one of Dave's sketches and then went to see Dave at his home with Charles Cecil, the MD of Revolution. It was a real honour to see into Dave's studio, and some of the pages he was working on for Martha Washington Goes To War - his pencils were so exciting to see, as I'd only ever seen his finished pages in print. Dave was a truly nice guy (and still is, I presume) and was very encouraging about my art. In the short time we had to speak, he even gave me a few tips on composition that have remained with me to this day. I remember Charles being quite impressed that Dave was so positive, and although I didn't paint many of the backgrounds for *BASS*, I'm convinced that my being taken on by Revolution was in part due to that meeting. I've always been a bit sorry that we've never done a sequel to *BASS*, as we only scratched the surface of the world it was set within."

Beneath A Steel Sky was published by Virgin in March 1994, and reached the number one slot in the Gallup charts. The US magazine *PC Gamer* awarded the game the Best Dialogue award in January 1995, and in May 1995, it was awarded the prestigious Golden Joystick for Best Adventure. Back to Steve: "Presently, I'm employed by Revolution Software in the capacity of Producer. Revolution has been producing top quality games for over eleven years. I've been with them for eight years. At the moment, I am involved in the design and development of *Broken Sword – The Sleeping Dragon*, the third game in the *Broken Sword* series. I am also involved in bringing the first of the Broken Sword series to the Game Boy Advance. It's going to be quite a challenge to bring a 2 CD game down to fit on the small cartridge for the GBA. We are developing a whole new philosophy towards development in order for us to do so. In the past, I have written and drawn a daily cartoon strip for a local paper, as well as turning my hand to other comic work. I have a love of oil painting too, and continue to paint in an abstract style whenever I get the chance. Although the pictures on my gallery page *[www.steve.ince.btinternet.co.uk]* are all done on the computer, I am hoping to add a section for my oil paintings at some point."

Early in my association with Steve, he showed me a sketch of a character he'd been toying with for some time, in between other projects. It was a cartoon cat with an eyepatch, called Scout. Steve hoped to produce the adventures of the mono-ocular feline as a newspaper strip, but his new duties as a producer at Revolution did not leave him much in the way of free time to pursue it any further. "The original idea for the strip came about when Toby [Steve's first newspaper strip] was cancelled by my (then) local paper. I was convinced that I needed a strip with a



sketches and ideas before launching into the strip properly. On and off, Scout has taken ten years to get where he is now. Along the way, other characters kept popping into my head or onto the paper as doodles and now I have a cast of between 30 and 40 characters (I ought to count them up properly one day). Sometimes I wish I had more time to draw more strips, so that I could include all of the characters on a regular basis. There was a point when the characters and ideas were so varied that I knew the strip could no longer be about Scout alone, and so the name Juniper Crescent came into being. At the moment, the strip is being well received. All of the feedback has been very positive and encouraging. This doesn't mean that no one hates it - just that those who do haven't told me so! I seem to have a regular following, though they are relatively small in number at the moment. I hope that I have a strip that is not only funny, but that can also speak to people, and for that reason, I'd like to reach as wide an audience as possible. Who knows what the future might hold..."

different appeal. I happened to be walking down the street one day, when I saw this poor old cat sitting on a wall, with only one eye. 'I bet he has some tales to tell', I thought, and so Scout the One-Eyed Cat was born. My first versions are very strange to look at now - he had a much fuzzier face - and I'm glad I developed him through

Simon Bowland, editor of the small press Nucomix, *[www.nucomix.fsnet.co.uk]*, commented: "Ever since I first met Steve, he's been producing newspaper strips. Some of his work [the strip Toby] saw regular print in his local newspaper, and when I got back in touch with him, he sent me his latest work: Juniper Crescent. I'd always envisaged running a newspaper style strip at the bottom of the editorial page in Nucomix, so I asked if I could publish his Juniper Crescent material there. He very kindly agreed, and the strip now has a monthly home in print. Steve's talent shows through in these strips. Not only are they drawn superbly, but the writing is excellent. For me, three-panel strips are much harder to write than five, ten or twenty page strips. You basically have three panels to tell the story and generally make the reader laugh. Three panels... but Steve seems able to do this effortlessly. He now publishes Juniper Crescent via his own website, where he rolls out two new full colour episodes every week. People are now starting to sit up and take notice of his website, which attracts more and more visitors as the weeks go by. People are talking about Juniper Crescent, and more importantly, they're enjoying it. Steve deserves this success, because he's a talented individual who has been overlooked for far too long."

THE SAPPHIRE CLAW

So what *does* the future hold for the denizens of Juniper Crescent? Well, Steve has just made a deal with Borderline affiliate site *Digital Webbing*, for the strip to appear in their Eagle Award-winning *Comic Book Network Electronic Magazine (CBEM)*. Not content to rest on his laurels, Steve explained the next step: "What I want to do is run with two strips a week as normal, but introduce a serial strip based on Juniper Crescent, posting one small episode a week. Slightly more serious in tone than the regular JC strip, and certainly it will have situations where the characters are in danger, but it's going to be more of an adventure angle rather than anything heavy. There will be plenty of humour, but it's less in the style of a gag build-up, as with a normal strip, and more in terms of what the situation throws up. In some ways, it's more like Bone – adventure combined with humour."

Borderline has been given the exclusive first glimpse of the new serial, entitled The Sapphire Claw.

BL

THE SAPPHIRE CLAW EPISODE 1 © Steve Ince 2002

"I'D MANAGED TO GIVE THE PIRATES I'D SIGNED UP WITH THE SLIP AND STRUCK OUT ACROSS THE ISLAND ALONE."
"AT LAST I'D REACHED THE END OF MY QUEST."
OH, YES! THIS IS DEFINITELY THE PLACE.
I JUST HOPE I'M WELL ENOUGH PREPARED.

SCREW YOU, EMPEROR ZOMBIE [or BEING MIKE MIGNOLA]

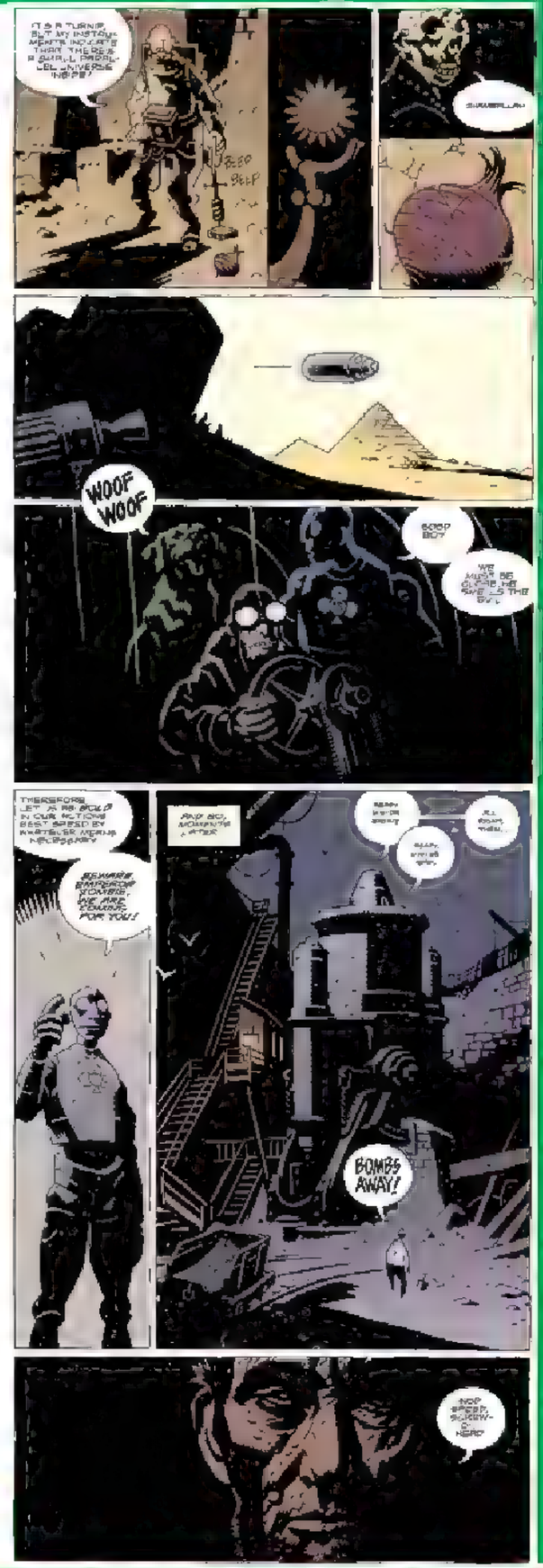
THIS May, Mike Mignola unveils a glimpse of something he'd bottled up in a dark corner of his brain while he worked on the last Hellboy series.

The Amazing Screw-On Head is a hopping mechanical head with a wardrobe of bodies that help him fight the good fight – as an Agent of Order for President Abraham Lincoln – against threats to all human life such as the diabolical Emperor Zombie. Aided and abetted by his trusty companions, Mister Groin and Mister Dog, only Screw-On Head can prevent Emperor Zombie from uncovering and deciphering the Kalakistan Fragment. Clearly in the same irreverent vein as Hellboy and yet altogether more deranged, Mignola describes this one-shot as:

"A first look at a dry, dusty little world that's been growing in my head for a couple years now. It's made of antique toys and broken furniture, some brass tacks, and lots of string and wire. I think the end result is a comic book that smells like an old leather suitcase. Enjoy!" Erm... Yeah... Okay. It appears that Mignola, once renowned for his unique vision of superheroes, is following a less trod path – clearly his roots lie in underground comix.

Two short months later, in July, Hellboy returns for an all-new miniseries: The Third Wish.

The Amazing Screw-On Head is written and illustrated by Mike Mignola, with colours by Dave Stewart. Published by Dark Horse it's on sale from May 15th for $2.99. BL



Click on Globe returns to contents

TANK GIRL™ RETURNS

BRITISH comics legend *Tank Girl* is to return, courtesy of Titan Books' ongoing series of classic UK reprints.

Tank Girl was created by British-based comics mavericks Alan Martin and Jamie Hewlett - the latter now a household name thanks to his work with the Gorillaz virtual pop group. She first appeared in the classic UK anthology **Deadline**, which was created in the late 1980s by stalwart artists Steve Dillon and Brett Ewins.

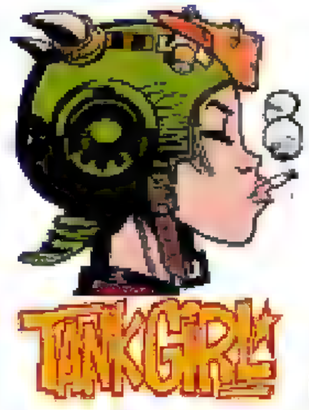
The magazine also featured work from creators as diverse as Jaime Hernandez (reprints of his *Locas* strip from **Love and Rockets**) and Peter Milligan (now the controversial writer of Marvel's **X-Force**).

The stories were later reprinted by Dark Horse Comics in the US, but collected editions of the *Tank Girl* strips have been out of print for almost a decade.

Titan's first new edition, to be published in April 2002, will feature coloured *Tank Girl* strips, a new introduction, a *Tank Girl* origin story by Alan Martin, and previously unseen material from Jamie Hewlett.

Tank Girl has received acclaim from an astonishing variety of sources, ranging from *The Face* magazine to comedian Lenny Henry, red-hot creator Grant Morrison (**New X-Men**, **The Invisibles**) to musicians Graham Coxon (Blur) and even early 80s hitster Adam Ant.

Alan Martin, *Tank Girl* co-creator, said: "I've heard it said that the comicbook enjoys a renaissance about once every ten years: from Superman in the forties to Spider-Man, from **Mad** magazine to Robert Crumb and the Freak Brothers, to *Judge Dredd* and on to *Tank Girl* and the graphic novel in the eighties and nineties. "A decade has passed, so what now? ... Bugger me, it's *Tank Girl* again!"



Tank Girl in a nut-er, 88mm-shell

TANK Girl was born in a Worthing bedsit in 1988, springing from the warped imaginations of Jamie Hewlett and Alan Martin into the first issue of Deadline magazine.

The strip stood out - even among favourites such as *Wired World* by Philip Bond and reprints of Jaime Hernandez' much-lauded Love and Rockets - because of its post-feminist and post-apocalyptic vision of a not too distant future.

Tank Girl's aggressive attitude, upfront humour and sexuality appealed hugely to the comics-buying audience of the late 80s and early 90s. But Hewlett and Martin subverted the character, every time they saw the opportunity, believing she could be all things to all people - and proving themselves correct by the enthusiastic response from their readers.

Tank Girl became an international phenomenon after Penguin Books acquired the rights to collect the strips as a graphic novel. The book went on to be published in Spain, Italy, Germany, Scandinavia, Argentina, Brazil and Japan, while several publishers fought for the US license.

Dark Horse Comics won the battle and published *Tank Girl* together with an American version of Deadline. Interest began to build in creating a film version. By now, she had reached icon status. *Tank Girl* T-shirts had already appeared - including one for the Clause 28 March against then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's homophobic legislation.

The jeans company Wrangler used *Tank Girl* in a series of press ads in 1991. Model Sarah Stockbridge posed as Tank Girl in a series of photos used in *Elle*, *Time Out*, *Select* and *The Face*. *Vogue* cited her as a crucial influence on "Bad Girl Fashion", which featured shaven heads, body piercing and tattoos. But when the *Tank Girl* movie, directed by Rachel Talalay, was a box office flop, Deadline folded - and a new Tank Girl comic failed.

Hewlett moved into a flat with Blur's Damon Albarn, and eventually the pair created the virtual pop combo Gorillaz. *Tank Girl* seemed to have fired off her last shell - until now. BL

A superfluity of Smilin' Stan the Man!

HOW STAN LEE
and
STEVE DITKO CREATE
SPIDER-MAN!
ON THESE THREE PAGES, STAN AND STEVE REALLY UNWIND AND HAVE SOME FUN! WE HOPE YOU'LL ENJOY THIS FEATURETTE AS MUCH, AS THEY ENJOYED DOING IT!
Stan Lee
Steve Ditko

PRIME pick amongst the plethora of pulse-pounding publications soon to appear in print about a certain publishing house is Excelsior! The Amazing Life of Stan Lee, a new biography for which the mentor of all things Marvel has even coined a new word.

The new book, available from Simon and Schuster in May - just in time to catch the wave of *Spider-Man* movie hysteria - has been dubbed "a bio-autography" by the man himself, in tribute to the collaborative style of the book. Stan shares the writing credit with George Mair, who has also penned a biography of Oprah Winfrey. "A lot of the book is direct quotes from me," Stan explained. "But I figured if I was going to be quoted, I wanted it to sound like me. So I re-wrote a great deal of the book, so even though George wrote it, I wrote most of it in a way."

This is why Stan coined a new word for the collaboration. "It's a bio-autography," he said. "It's a combination biography and autobiography."

To the long-term Marvelite, this may seem uncannily similar to the style of writing which made Stan a comics legend in the first place, with Mr Mair taking the place of the artists to whom Stan delivered a basic plot. After the strips were drawn, they would return to Stan, who would then write the dialogue. The 256-page package - probably littered with alliteration, as was customary in his long-running *Soapbox* column - comes wrapped in a cover by Marvel art legend John Romita Sr. and features Stan and many of Marvel's best-known characters.

Excelsior! The Amazing Life of Stan Lee is published on May 7, with a cover price of $14 in the US.

Originally printed in **Spider-Man Annual** #1 © 1964 Marvel Comics Group - one wonders how accurate it will end up being

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RENOWNED RETAILER HARRY KREMER DIES

Borderline's Paul Annis offers his personal overview of one of the comics retailing industry's most influential and important men. A man arguably responsible for the success of Dave Sim's Cerebus...

HARRY KREMER, owner of one of the best-known comic shops in the world, died recently at the age of 55 at his home in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. He had had heart trouble in recent years and had been fitted with a pacemaker, but on the night of Tuesday, 12 March his heart finally gave out.

Now & Then Books in downtown Kitchener, which Harry opened more than 30 years ago, is the oldest comic shop in Canada and one of the oldest in the English-speaking world.

Harry had previously worked at the Smiles 'n' Chuckles chocolate factory in Kitchener, but when it closed in 1971 he used his savings and his own collection of 10,000 comics to open the shop that October at 103 Queen Street South. After Bill Johnson, with whom he had started the business, left in 1972 to move to Western Canada, Harry ran the shop on his own.

Harry always supported local comic creators, including Richard Comely, the writer, artist, and publisher of **Captain Canuck**.

But it is Harry's long association with Dave Sim, creator and publisher of **Cerebus**, that has made his name known to comic fans around the world. As Harry told the story, he and his partner were sitting outside the shop in October 1971, taking a break from setting everything up, when Dave, then a 15-year-old high school student, turned up wanting to know whether they bought comics. He was one of Harry's first customers, and later became one of his first employees.

When Dave began producing fanzines, Harry published some of them, including *Now and Then Times*, and *Happy Harry's Tales from the Pazooto*.

A few years later Dave talked him into publishing **Oktoberfest Comics**, which was a collaboration between Sim and artist Gene Day. It was issued in 1976 to coincide with Kitchener's beer festival.

In 1977 Dave began publishing his own work, starting with the first issue of **Cerebus**. Harry bought 25 per cent of the entire print run of each of the early issues, acting as the comic's distributor in Eastern Canada.

A year or two later Harry bought most of the original art for both **Cerebus** and **The Beavers** (Dave's weekly strip for the local newspaper), selling it in the shop and through full-page advertisements in the back of **Cerebus**. His continuing financial support in those early years must have played an important part in ensuring the survival of the comic.

"...Harry bought 25% of the entire print run of the early issues [of Cerebus.]"

By the early 1980s Now & Then Books needed to expand, so in 1982 Harry moved the shop across the street to 90 Queen Street South. There it has remained to this day.

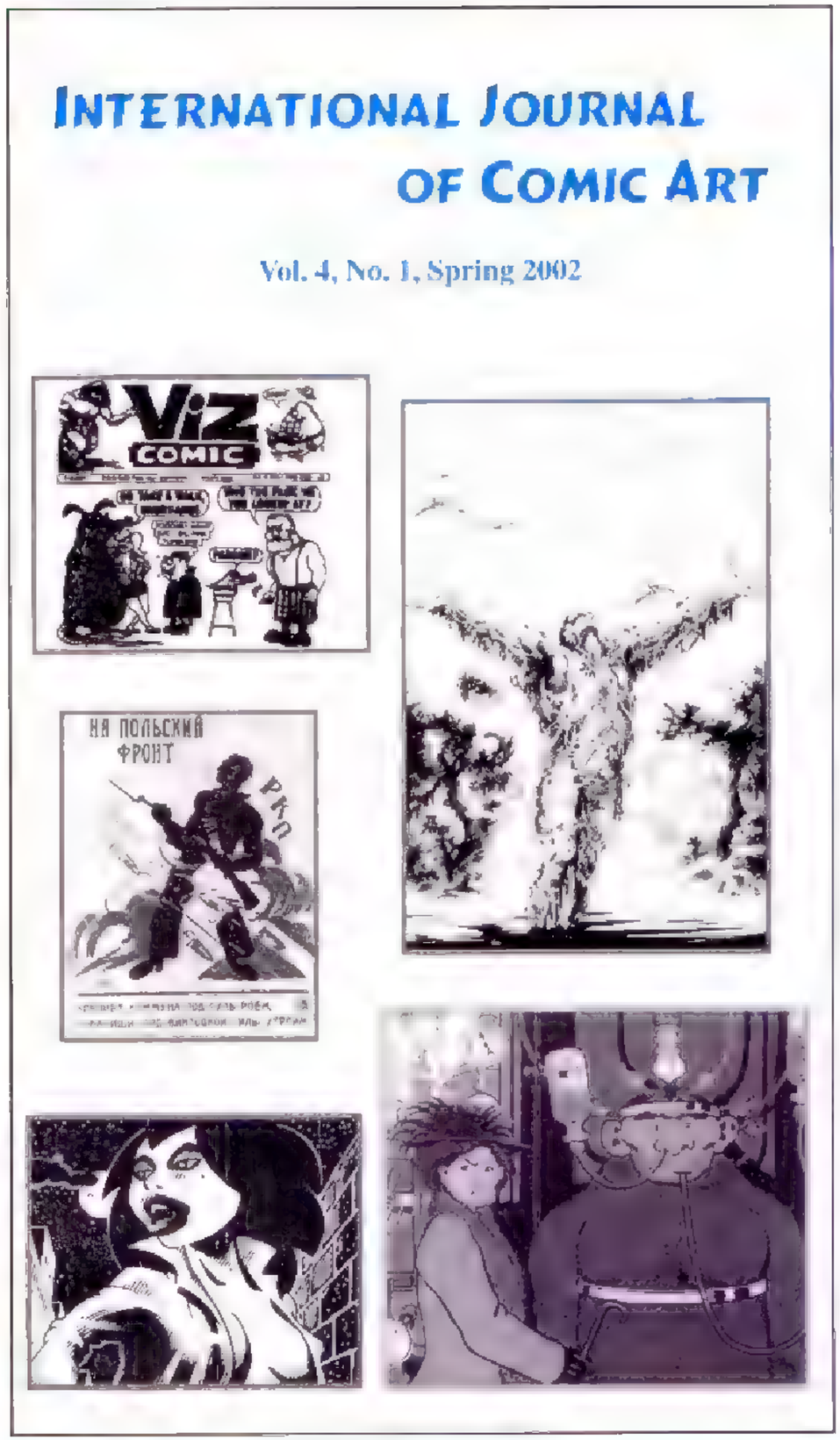
It was there that I first met Harry several years ago, after my parents moved to Kitchener and I began visiting them there at intervals. I can't count myself among his close friends; I was just another occasional customer who liked **Cerebus**, but Harry was always happy to see me and talk about comics. Each of my visits over the years was punctuated with long conversations with him at the shop, often in his office surrounded by original drawings done for him by artists who had visited Now & Then Books, including P. Craig Russell, Barry Windsor-Smith, and of course Dave Sim.

Thus I came to know at first hand Harry's quiet, unassuming personality, and his unquenchable enthusiasm for comics. He had a particular fondness for good humour comics, especially the work of Dave Sim, Carl Barks, and Don Rosa.

The last time I was in Kitchener, a few months ago, Dave Sim happened to need a place away from his studio and his home in which he could be interviewed by Rich Henn, creator and publisher of the comic **Timespell**. Dave turned to Harry, who willingly set up a table and chairs in the book and poster alcove for Dave and his interviewer to use on the scheduled Saturday afternoon, while customers (myself among them) came and went quietly in the rest of the shop.

Harry's presence that afternoon was typically low-key. When I spoke briefly to Rich Henn while Dave was getting ready to leave, he asked me if I was Harry. Later, after he had met Harry himself and had a chance to talk to him, he exclaimed to me, "What a nice guy!"

It was a typical reaction. He was indeed a "nice guy", a good man as well as a good business-man. He will be missed. BL



WORLD COMICS

Paul Gravett's look at the rest of the world, its comics and its attitudes towards comics...

Resources

MY passion for discovering more about comics from all over the world was triggered by a library copy of Maurice Horn's massive World Encyclopedia of Comics (Chelsea House), first published in 1976. As a reference book, I couldn't borrow it, but I would go regularly to the library and read through the whole thing, page by page. Horn assembled experts from many countries to write some of the very first information about World Comics ever published in English. Just as I was losing interest in mainstream American comic books, this book opened so many windows. How could anyone lose interest in comics and "grow out of them", when there were so many different forms, subjects and styles, past and present? The revised, corrected and updated edition of Horn's Encyclopedia came out a few years back, and I even assisted with a couple of new UK entries. It remains an inspirational resource that anyone curious about this global medium should check out. Try your local library, and if they haven't got it, pester them to get it in for you.

The other indefatigable ambassador for greater understanding of comics worldwide is John A. Lent. He has authored numerous collections of essays and bibliographic references, most recently Illustrating Asia (Curzon Press), a mind-expanding survey of manga from Japan, cergam from Indonesia, locally created comics in India from Classics Illustrated-style Amar Chitra Katha to recent superheroes from Raj Comics, lianhuanhua and the more Japanese influenced manhua from China, Sri Lanka's cartooning scene and more.

Lent has also established with his own efforts and funds the only seriously international English language scholarly magazine in this field. He started *The International Journal of Comic Art* (or *IJOCA*) in 1999 and it appears twice a year in a compact paperback format. The latest issue, Vol. 4, No. 1, Spring 2002, has 322 packed pages, opening with a particularly interesting flashback focus on the *Early Days of Comics Scholarship*, recalled by Horn and other pioneering specialists from the intellectual ferment of the Sixties, such as Alvaro de Moya from Brazil and Wolfgang J Fuchs from Germany. It comes up to date with today's trailblazers like women's comics historian Trina Robbins, whose latest book is a long overdue re-evaluation and biography of the American post-Victorian feminist cartoonist Nell Brinkley (McFarland & Co.), and Britain's own Martin Barker, best known for A Haunt of Fears (Pluto Press/University of Mississippi Press), his rigorous exposé of the Communist agenda behind the UK anti-horror comics campaign.

Other *IJOCA* highlights include a substantial interview with Steve (Swamp Thing/Taboo/Tyrant) Bissette, and essays on comics from New Zealand, revolutionary Russia and even on the thematic evolution of the rude, crude British success story Viz. Don't worry, *IJOCA* is not stuffy and academic, but accessible and stimulating, and costs US$30 for an individual subscription for one year (two issues) from: John A. Lent, 669 Ferne Blvd., Drexel Hill, PA 19026, USA. Or check out his website: *www.ComicsResearch.org/ijoca*. Tell him I sent you.

To wrap up, I'd like to recommend highly two of the most dazzling recent visual feasts about World Comics. Thierry Groensteen, the former director of France's comics museum in Angoulême, co-ordinated a stunning exhibition for the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris in 2000, "Maitres de la bande dessinée Européenne' (or "Masters of European Comic Art"). Alongside commentary (in French) from a dozen experts, the catalogue (published by Éditions Seuil) presents crystal clear reproductions of original

artwork by some 70 artists from thirteen countries in Europe, from such "inventors" of comics as Rodolphe Töpffer and Wilhelm Busch to contemporary maestros like Lorenzo Mattotti and Dave McKean. It's the first time the distinct cultural identity of European comics has been so comprehensively detailed.

Secondly, Hong Kong Comics by Wendy Siuyi Wong (Princeton Architectural Press) is an eye-popping survey of more than a century of Chinese cartoons and manhua, explained through over 1,000 colour reproductions of rare comics, most of them never before seen in the West. After her concise historical overview, she presents four heavily illustrated sections, on satire and politics, humour, kung fu/ action and the children's market, with detailed captions, closing with a list of other useful studies and biographies of selected artists, from post-World War 2 cartoonist Lui Yu-tin to current superstar Ma Wing-shing, seen in Jademan and Jonsky comic books. Among the too numerous delights in this overwhelming book are the unofficial hyperkinetic Bruce Lee comics and the definitely unlicensed Flying Black Batman.

Thanks to books like these, bit by bit we are getting a clearer picture of the true diversity and creativity of this under-appreciated, if not despised, storytelling artform. There is so much more to comics than this week's Diamond shipment, even on a good week. It's just waiting out there for you to explore. My motto remains, to paraphrase Samuel Johnson: "A man [or woman] who tires of comics, tires of life". **BL**

WHAT IS MANGA?

Kevin Hill looks at the key manga series Astro Boy by Osamu Tezuka

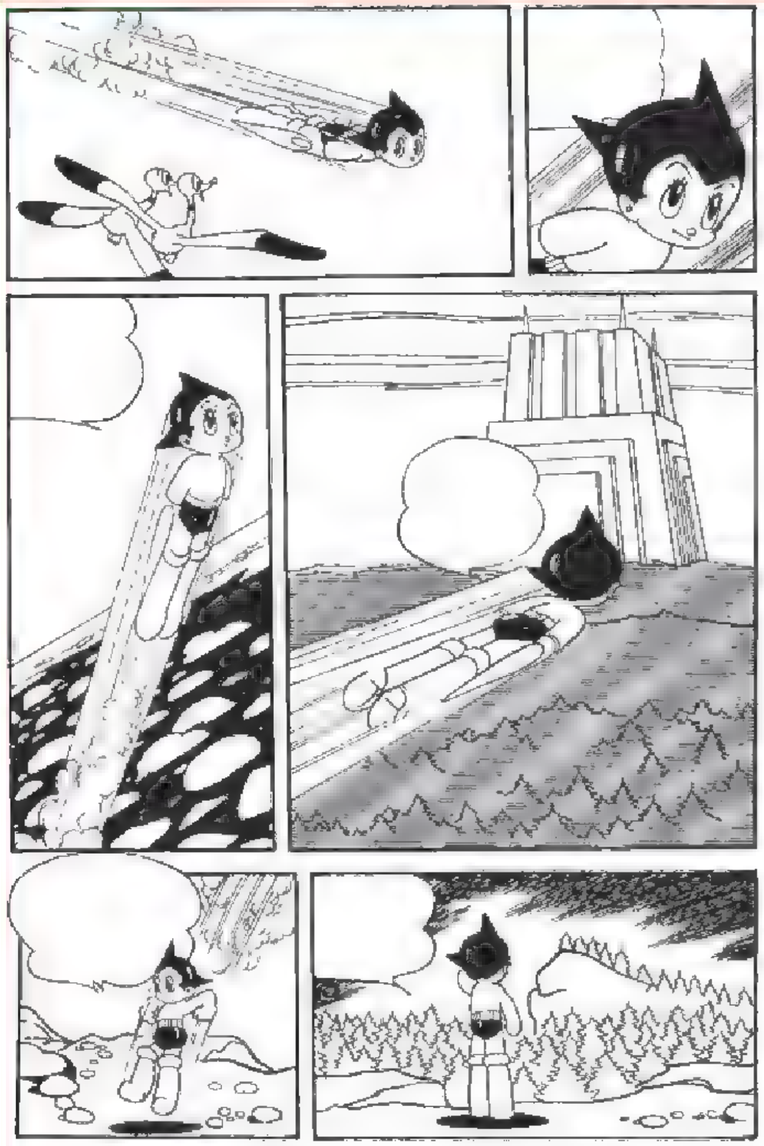
Boy Or Astro Boy

CONTINUING a trend started with the release of **Lone Wolf & Cub** in collected format, Dark Horse is bringing another classic Japanese comic to Western shores, in the form of **Astro Boy**.

Originally created in the early 50s, **Astro Boy** - known in Japan as **Tetsuwan Atomu** (Mighty Atom) - proved a hit, taking Japan by storm and, via the accompanying cartoon, one of the earliest Japanese animated TV series, even managing to invade homes in the United States during the 1960s. Even with this popularity, the comics which made **Astro Boy** a hit in its native land were never released in English. Instead, the few **Astro Boy** comics released originated outside the nation of his birth.

The creator of **Astro Boy** is Osamu Tezuka, viewed by many as both the "God Of Manga" and "The Japanese Walt Disney", although the latter has also been said of Hayao Miyazaki, creator of **Nausicaa** and **Princess Mononoke**. Born in 1928 in the Osaka region of Japan, Tezuka grew up with a love of stories, movies and comics thanks to the influence of his parents. Teased as a child, he found solace in reading comics, and also creating his own; it was through this that he found a way to begin making friends.

Although his career diverted when he studied medicine in college and became a practising physician, Tezuka still had a mind for stories and continued creating comics, even producing a serialised story for children in a local newspaper. His first hit comic came in the form of **Jungle Emperor Leo**, and it wasn't long afterwards that his most famous creation was born. As he wished to produce animations like those



of Walt Disney, Tezuka formed an animation studio which produced the *Astro Boy* cartoon. It became one of the earliest hit cartoons on Japanese TV.

While Tezuka is far and away the most famous creator in Japanese comics, he is still somewhat unknown in the US, with only a few of his comics being translated. The most prominent translation was that of **Adolf** - a tale of the lives of two boys named Adolf, set during the early part of the 20th Century. This was followed by **Black Jack**, a tale of a rogue doctor which allowed Tezuka to draw on his medical knowledge.

Considering the subject matter contained within many of his stories, Tezuka's style is very unusual, being more akin to that of Walt Disney and the early Warner Bros. cartoons than to the stereotypical "manga style". This style prevented his stories from being inaccessible to either young or old, which explains the success he achieved in his lifetime - he was still working as hard as ever until his death in 1989, a death that rocked Japan as much as, say, the death of Elvis.

Astro Boy begins with an introduction to the future as imagined by Tezuka in the 1950s, starting with a history of robotics from the 1970s and its evolution through to the date of Astro Boy's creation in the story, April 7th 2003. As Frederik Schodt, translator of **Astro Boy** and friend to Tezuka, states, "If [Tezuka] were alive, he would have a wonderful time comparing the world he attempted to depict in the 1950s - of 2003 A.D - with the actual world we inhabit today."

Even though much of **Astro Boy** is light, and the style in which it was drawn is also more "cartoony", it nevertheless has a darker edge. Astro Boy is created by a doctor to replace a son who died in a road accident; the robot's failure to grow as a real boy would results in his creator selling him for scrap. Luckily Astro Boy fails to reach the scrap heap; instead he is saved by kindly Professor Ochanomizu, who teaches him how to use his abilities. It is once Astro Boy realises who he is that he becomes a hero - a hero who, interestingly, provided Frank Miller with the blueprint for Rusty The Boy Robot, partner to The Big Guy.

Dark Horse Comics is currently in the process of producing the first 6 volumes of **Astro Boy**, in conjunction with Studio Proteus. While they currently only have plans to produce the first 12 volumes, they are hoping to be able to release all those volumes which are currently available in Japan. The volumes will be released monthly, in a similar manner to Dark Horse's **Lone Wolf & Cub** books. Dark Horse will also be releasing the books outside the direct market, to mainstream bookstores - both independent shops and major chains like Barnes & Noble and Borders. This project will be handled by book distributor LPC, through whom Dark Horse has successfully released **Lone Wolf & Cub** outside the direct market. This will allow those adults who watched *Astro Boy* as children but do not frequent comicbook stores to discover the comic book version of the TV show they loved. If this market can be reached, Dark Horse may have a highly successful commercial release on its hands.

The 224 page Astro Boy Vol.1 is on sale from the 27th of March, priced $9.95. BL

MILESTONES

Mike Kidson continues his exploration of key moments in the history of comicbooks

The Public Face of the Publisher

FICTION may reveal something of its creators' personal attitudes, but it's generally risky to go too far along that route; after all, fiction is imaginative, not documentary. And looking at commercial fiction for signs of its *publishers*' attitudes is even more risky.

In the case of Alfred Harmsworth, though, the risk is minimal and well worth taking – he was a "hands on" publisher, unable to delegate, who continued to supervise the content of all of his many periodicals regularly until almost the end of his life. Harmsworth's **Comic Cuts** (1890-1953) began the boom in British weekly comics that persisted almost to the end of the 20th century. Both it and the many other comics subsequently published by Harmsworth dominated the British comics market for more than fifty years, defining its style, content and typical audience. Embodied in those comics were the strong views of their publisher concerning the tone which popular publishing should take.

Talking to the reader

The strip reproduced below appeared in **Comic Cuts #10** in July 1890. It was almost certainly written by Harmsworth himself. Its message appears simple enough - a gag is being made out of a warning to rival publishers against stealing jokes from Harmsworth's comic. But at a closer glance there's more to it than that.

The idea of appearing to show the reader the "behind the scenes" production of a humorous magazine was nothing new by 1890 - the satirical magazine *Punch* had been practising it for half a century. But Harmsworth was assiduous about it, building it into editorials, into a slangy style of dialogue that addressed the reader directly, and creating a whole cast of "office characters", from Mr. C.C. the **Comic Cuts** editor down to Bottles the office boy. Whether he deliberately intended to establish a comprehensive method of engaging the readers with the comics by making them feel privy to the production process we do not know, but that was its effect. In the long term it became a standard device in British comics, surviving even now in the fictive form of **2000AD**'s alien editor Tharg and his assemblage of script and art droids. Quite coincidentally, Stan Lee very successfully adopted exactly the same method in his Marvel Comics' "Bullpen Bulletins".

Here we see an early attempt at the technique. The reader of **Comic Cuts #10** is shown a reader of **Comic Cuts** and told in no uncertain terms that the comic brings you the best jokes first and therefore should be bought in preference to thieving imitations. So there are three clear messages in the strip: the warning to other publishers, the advertising of **Comic Cuts** as the best comic available, and an implicit engagement of the readers with the comic by, as it were, holding up a humorous mirror in which they see one of them doing exactly as they are.

Respectability

But that humorous mirror is artfully distorted. The character reading a joke first in **Comic Cuts** and subsequently in imaginary rival publications is a caricature of an intellectual - literally an "egghead" - dressed in smart middle class clothing. In reality, Harmsworth's magazines would have had few, if any, readers of that type; the constituent audience for his halfpenny publications was the working class. A strip showing a member of a higher social class enjoying **Comic Cuts** was surely a way to appeal to any snobbery in his readers, assuring them that they were in good company in their reading habits. That the "toff" is also clearly an eccentric individual simultaneously allows his readers a laugh at the absurdity of those higher on the social scale. But it further conveys a serious, straight-faced message that Harmsworth was at great pains to put across - that his magazines were eminently suitable for *all* classes to read.

Harmsworth, one of many children of an ineffectual, alcoholic father, knew poverty and craved respectability - so his magazines proclaimed their respectability, and by extension his, loudly and often. His editorials constantly stressed decency and suitability for all the family, and strips like this further asserted both a high moral tone and a readership that spanned the social order. In fact, such protestations were yet another distortion.

Irony

As his publishing empire grew and he became an owner and founder of daily newspapers, Harmsworth gained his respectability, and his magazines began to become genuinely respectable too. But in 1890 he was struggling, and he was well aware that his audience had a taste for sensationalism. So while his editorials and strips like this trumpeted their decency, the comics also contained stories with a distinct taste for the macabre, and strips which were often mocking as much as amusing. The periodicals that the jovial egghead is shown enjoying were much more like the old, sensational "Penny Dreadfuls" than their publisher was willing to admit. A.A. Milne had a point when he quipped that Harmsworth "replaced the penny dreadfuls with the halfpenny dreadfuller".

Finally, the irony behind this strip, quite unrecognised by the readers of the day, is that it demonstrates colossal cheek and hypocrisy on Harmsworth's part. Just two months earlier he had been cheerfully cutting and pasting cartoon and short strips from others' magazines into his own – indeed, the entire first issue of **Comic Cuts** had been made up from other magazines. Only when his rival and sometime former employer, James Henderson, publisher of **Scraps**, detected his pilfering and threatened legal action did he begin advertising for artists. Yet here he was, only weeks later, sternly admonishing others not to do what he himself had no qualms about doing… the most artful distortion of all. BL

WARNING!

If the editors of other papers continue to copy COMIC CUTS *jokes, cases like the following will be numerous.*

He saw it in COMIC CUTS first, and he nearly laughed the top of his head off.

Then he found it in *Prig'd Bits*. It was so good that he laughed again, though not so violently.

He was thunderstruck when he found that the editor of *The Joke Stealer* had cribbed it. "It's a little too much," he muttered; "I'm tired of that infernal joke."

A week later he was fairly staggered, for he found that *Snips* had slightly altered it, and labelled it original.

Finally, he took up a local paper, and that joke; but before he could read it reason gave way, and they led him off to the lunatic asylum, and chained him down in the padded room.

THE BLANK PAGE

Chev says swearing isn't big, nor is it clever

What the #$%*?

SWEARING may not be big and clever, but we do it for a reason. One thing we all learn as we grow older is that swearing can have a function in language, almost being a function of language in itself, as we adapt swearing to enrich the import of our speech by using strong language as a modifier. I have little problem with swearing; I do however - as you may have ascertained by now - have a problem with morons.

The curious guidelines by which Marvel has segregated its comics according to its own, quite thickheaded, ratings system have been in operation for a little over six months and are already more garbled and witless than even you and I could imagine. I'm firmly of the opinion that comics, like books, should not even be rated; leave that sort of nonsense for the monkeys whose daily diet of entertainment consists of television and movies. There should be no better filter for the reading habits of children than the guidance of a parent until such time as that parent considers their children to be able to choose for themselves. That is a minority opinion in this day and age, where many parents appear to be in said parental position as an unfortunate side effect of an incidental bout of sexual intercourse, probably not of sufficient quality to warrant the penalty of being saddled with such outrageous and ridiculous concepts as "maturity" and "parental responsibility". However, the beleaguered retailer can stand to be without the belligerent interference of those childbearers whose first interaction with their child's reading habits is to discover them consuming something of which they disapprove. Following which, rather than reprimanding the child - or themselves for not showing more of an interest in the first place - they march down to the comic shop and harangue the comic book guy for doing his job within the constantly varying and immature parameters of this industry.

Marvel's All Ages comics "carry no label and are appropriate for readers of all ages…". That should be self-explanatory, or so you'd think. The first issue of the X-Men spin-off **Muties** is unlabelled and features explicit and bloody bullying, domestic violence at gunpoint, and a high school shooting. None of this is what I call appropriate for all ages, either by my personal standards or as a parent, and it certainly isn't consistent with Marvel's remit. And remember that this is Marvel's most lenient rating, equivalent to a movie rated U; the retailer would not balk at selling this to anyone who might want it.

Marvel PG is "fine for most readers", whatever that means. Fine by whose standards? What sort of readers are most readers? And why is **Daredevil #30** rated a PG when it has censored dialogue in it? That's like taking your kids to see a PG movie that has explicit swearing bleeped out so that you as a parent are being denied and patronised and you still have to explain the swearing to your kids anyway. If it's a PG there should be no excessively strong language.

"...explicit and bloody bullying, domestic violence at gunpoint, and a high school shooting."

If Bendis writes one of his characters saying, "We're talking some major fucking shit here", the editor should work with him to compromise the language into a PG format. Otherwise, the comic becomes a PG+ or even (God help it) a MAX comic. If you have to change the dialogue to "…major $%@#ing $#+% here" then your ratings system isn't working; you are restricting instead of unleashing the creativity of your writers and your editing skills should be called into question.

Now, PG+ should be where most of the modern Marvel output exists, being comics where there's "…a little more violence or some strong language… recommended for our teen and adult readers." I don't want to be a fly in their ointment, but teenage and adult readers are all Marvel that has left, and not for much longer at this rate. The only comic I've read with a PG+ rating recently was **Elektra #7**, containing no violence at all, although rape is mentioned and someone gets called a bastard and someone else gets called a "damn bitch". Apparently, explicitly stating that sort of dialogue is more mature than implying words such as "fuck" and "shit" to a younger audience, which is as backwards a way of looking at things as I've seen in a good long time.

Adult readers of Marvel's comics should be unconcerned at whatever rating it wishes to stamp on its covers, but it's bizarre that Marvel is censoring its own material as rigidly as the Comics Code Authority used to, as opposed to classifying comics within its own guidelines. It makes nonsense of Marvel's new self-rating system to implement it while continuing to censor and edit comics in order to comply with a lower age rating - that's exactly the sort of past restriction they abandoned the Code to avoid. While it's true that DC comics such as **The Flash** feature censored language, they do so under the restrictions of the Comics Code, and even then DC only complies with the Code when it wants to, with many of its books not carrying the stamp at all.

What can Marvel hope to achieve by further confusing the market with a ratings system that has no internal consistency and is based on a perception of its audience that is pitifully outdated? After all, it could make **Daredevil** a MAX Comic tomorrow and its readership would barely change. Independent publishers such as Dark Horse, Oni Press and Fantagraphics manage to reach their target audience with creative integrity intact, by making sure their product is correctly edited within the purview of its intended readership.

Could Marvel's ex-Vertigo editors start to apply their experience in producing adult-oriented comics to Marvel's 21st Century superheroes, by actually editing the work rather than simply censoring it, and ensuring that it reaches the readership as the author intended?

Or is that too much to fucking ask?

BL

LEARNING CURVES

Sarah Littlehales speculates to accumulate

Cat on a Hot Tin Shelf

IT'S been a couple of years since Jim Balent last drew the bubble-bodied Catwoman. Since then he's gone on to create his own T&A series **Tarot**, while the popularity of Ms Selina Kyle nose-dived to the brink of cancellation. Stories were desperately attempting to be melodramatic, vainly trying to keep readers' interest, even to the extent of having the character fake her own death. What was needed wasn't the disposal of Selina Kyle, but a makeover of her spandex-clad alter ego.

So the death of the original **Catwoman** series was the herald of the new.

New writer, new artist, new costume, new attitude. Gone are the whiskers and the tail, making way for leather that you have to pour into, reflective sleek goggles, and a chunky silver zip running from neck to crotch; screaming to be undone.

But the beauty of this relaunch is more than skin deep. Where Devin Grayson (**Batman: Gotham Knights**, **X-Men: Evolution**) made Catwoman a sympathetic cat burglar, Ed Brubaker and Darwyn Cooke have dished up a film noir comic heroine.

It's a more mature approach to a character that has so easily been washed over for the sake of showing her chest and butt cheeks. No longer is she a carefree spoilt bitch bouncing around the city and stirring the loins of the caped crusader. She's grown up, finally, becoming not just another edgy and hard driven bad girl, but a character who cares for others. She's been forced to face up to the reality of her sister being a prostitute, watching over her and the other working women of Gotham City - doing the dirty work that the Batman wouldn't touch with a ten foot bat-bargepole.

Each new story arc kicks off with a change in the art team, to keep the visuals fresh. The exit of both Cooke as penciller and **Madman**'s Mike Allred as inker will introduce the team of Brad Rader & Cameron Stewart, starting in issue five.

The first four issues - and Brubaker and Cooke's four-part *Slam Bradley* backup in **Detective Comics** that introduced the revamp - are becoming rarer and slightly more expensive as the popularity of the series rises, each issue having sold out. In the meantime it leaves those of us who missed the chance to buy it the first time around hoping that there'll be a trade paperback collection just around the corner.

Birds of Paradise

It's not new news any more, but Terry Moore's arrival on the DC series **Birds of Prey** is causing a soaring boost in sales.

The adventures of Black Canary (Green Arrow's ex-lover) and Oracle (the hero formerly known as Batgirl) have always been popular, especially among female readers looking for strong identifiable alternatives to the usual fare of extremely endowed stock characters that has saturated the market for so long. The characters are strong, determined and smart, but keep all the natural flaws of character that make them identifiable. Yet when you look at titles featuring other strong female characters, such as **Wonder Woman**, the sales seem to constantly slump and struggle. Possibly it is the invincible goddess quality around Wonder Woman that detaches her from identification by the same female readership as **Birds of Prey**. That, or the stigma from the Linda Carter TV series still lingers on.

In the case of DC's Amazon Princess they've pumped fresh creative blood into the title to keep interest in the character. However with **Birds of Prey**, despite it being a spin-off title, interest has reached a point where Warner Brothers are confident enough to commission a television series based on it.

What's more, issue 41 had to go back to the printers as it had sold out after sales couldn't meet demand. Tied in as part of the *Bruce Wayne: Murderer/Fugitive* storyline, the issue was bought by readers of the core **Batman** titles, along with the regular readers of **BoP**.

Birds Of Prey is currently displaying gorgeous dynamic covers by Phil Noto, which leads to disappointment when you move past the cover to the stylings of **Spider-Man 2099**'s Rick Leonardi (no offence to him or his work, but after the beautiful cover the inner artwork is almost anti-climatic). Leonardi is the latest regular penciller to follow the stunning work of Butch Guice and Greg Land earlier in the series. **BoP** has always been written by Chuck Dixon, ever since its trials as a mini-series and a couple of one-shot issues; it was quite the surprise to learn that Dixon is leaving **Birds of Prey** and all of his other Bat-related titles behind.

So what does the future hold? Well, with Dixon leaving and the high profile that the series presently sports, it was obvious (or maybe we should just be thankful) that a suitable replacement had to be found. This is where Terry Moore steps in (actually he steps in after a fill in issue penned by Steven Grant).

The man who made us care for Katchoo, Francine and David in **Strangers in Paradise** is having another stab at the superhero genre. Already known for writing the **Lady Supreme** series, Moore is now set to work with the master of monster art Dan Brereton for a three issue arc. It will be interesting to see the combination of Moore's strong and believably written women with Brereton's distinctive painted curves and angles. An interesting take for the **Birds of Prey** that's bound to fly away before they've had much chance to perch on the shelves. BL

ISSUES

Carol Close on awards and prostitutes

IT hasn't been a very good 12 months for comics awards. Those presented as part of last year's Comics 2001 convention in Bristol were an embarrassment to anyone but the most vociferous fan of **2000AD** (Best Artist Ever? Carlos Ezquerra!), while the recent spat between "friend of **Borderline**" Mark Waid and CrossGen has served to somewhat overshadow this year's Harveys. If all that isn't bad enough the UK's Eagle Awards seem to have become something of an afterthought, with all the prestige and glamour of a rainy night in Rochdale.

Now I remember a time when the Eagles - supposedly comics' very own version of the Oscars - were considered a big deal. Held annually, the ceremony itself was a regular highlight of the London-based UKCAC conventions. I also seem to recall that those titles lucky enough to grab a gong - **X-Men**, **Swamp Thing**, **Warrior** - would then proudly display an Eagle Awards logo on their cover for at least a month or two after winning. Oh, how the mighty have fallen…

This year's Eagle Awards winners were announced on page 30 of April's edition of **Comics International** and didn't even warrant a mention on the magazine's cover. Indeed, the results were only considered important enough to get a half-page without any photographs or analysis of the various outcomes (some of which were quite surprising - **JSA** winning Favourite Colour Comicbook, **Safe Area Gorazde** triumphing in the Best Graphic Novel section).

The bizarre thing about all this is that the Eagles' "organisers" (and what a lot of organisation it must take) still seem to harbour a wholly misguided belief that they matter.

"Established in 1976, the Eagle Award is one of the comics industry's earliest established and most coveted international prizes," runs the delusional introductory blurb in **CI**. Yeah, right. I'm sure Favourite Comics Writer/Artist Frank Miller is just clicking his heels in orgasmic delight at getting a mention on page 30 of an obscure UK-based industry trade magazine.

It strikes me that the real story here is that the Eagles now exist in name only - no better, no more prestigious or "coveted" than any of those other bogus "awards" lists that crop up every year in fanzines and on the Net. Call me old fashioned but as far as I'm concerned awards aren't really awards unless there's a ceremony, statuettes and speeches (and maybe a spot of supper and some extreme drunkenness to boot).

Now, I'm perfectly willing to accept that putting on awards ceremonies can cost big money and that there's very little of that particular commodity sloshing about in the British comics industry these days. So, assuming no well-heeled comic shop entrepreneur is waiting in the wings with wads of sponsorship cash and the organisers of the Bristol convention can't be persuaded to dump the National Comic Awards, surely it's high time the Eagles were laid to rest alongside Monty Python's dead parrot.

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Garth Ennis wrote **Preacher**. Garth Ennis wrote **Preacher**. Garth Ennis wrote **Preacher**. Just keep telling yourself that while checking out his soon to be released one-shot from Image, called **Pro**. Drawn by Jimmy Palmiotti and Amanda Connor, **Pro** tells the story of "a foul-mouthed, chain-smoking hooker who becomes superhuman." The title's promotional artwork helps underline the premise, featuring as it does the titular character looking every inch the prostitute of popular cliché: "fuck you, buddy" sneer, low cut top, skirt way up high, cigarette in hand - a picture of slouched and sluttish insouciance if ever there was one.

Now, **Pro** hasn't actually been released yet so I can't say whether its writing will be good, bad or indifferent, but it strikes me that if comics are interested in either a) attracting more female readers or b) appealing to fans with more brain cells than adolescent hormones, then maybe publishing this kind of title isn't the way to go about it.

Unlike artist Jim Steranko, who singled out the book for special admonition in his fire and brimstone post-9/11 rant last year, I don't for a moment believe that **Pro** is "evil". I do think, however, that based on what I've heard so far, its portrayal of prostitution is lazy and misogynistic. Believe it or not, but not all women who sleep with men for money are "foul-mouthed", chain-smokers or dress like extras from Flesh Gordon (they'll be telling us she's a "tart with a heart" next).

The really nasty thing here, though, is the insinuation that just because a woman turns tricks to make a living there's no possible way she could be anything other than trash. Or am I reading too much into the advance hype, which reveals that the story revolves around "an intergalactic bet which deems her [Pro] to be the least likely person on earth to be a hero"? (What, less likely than Ariel Sharon, Osama bin Laden, a serial killer or an out-and-out coward? See, it doesn't even stand up to the most cursory analysis.)

For all its self-conscious daring and supposed envelope pushing, I suspect **Pro** will do no more than reflect the bizarre love/hate attitude that the male species already harbours towards the sex worker profession. Many boys (let's not call them men, eh?) are turned on by the idea of doing it with a sexually voracious female who will do things to them their girlfriend wouldn't dream of, but are likewise thoroughly appalled by any woman who sleeps with several different men every night for money. Kind of hypocritical, don't you think? Similarly, fanboys from Aberdeen to Arkansas will be snapping up copies of **Pro** to "laugh at the stupid skank" while no doubt drooling like Pavlov's dog over the gratuitous titty shots and never ending flow of sexual innuendo.

One fan is said to have remarked to Palmiotti, "Sluts and superpowers: where was this when I was a kid?" Gee, and they say comics are for people too stupid to read books. BL

The Eagles Awards results for 2000 appear on page 66

MAN ON A MISSION

Martin Shipp's vision of a better comics industry

COMICS and music. How often do you see those two yoked together? For instance, on one of the discussion groups I frequent, there's more talk about music (and television) than there is about comics. Record stores carry graphic novels. There have been countless attempts at conveying the spirit of music in comics form, from Eisner's *Evvy Little Bug* through **Deadline** magazine and Kitchen Sink's **Bop!** to P. Craig Russell's heroic stab at **The Ring**. Musicians have drawn on comics for inspiration; yes, Paul McCartney's *Magneto And Titanium Man*; yes, The Teardrop Explodes; and how about 70s soul sensations The Real Thing's *You To Me Are Everything*? ("You give me just a taste of love to build my hopes upon, you know you've got the Power Girl to keep me holding on")*

But consider this: I say the comics industry isn't drawing *enough* inspiration from the music industry. Where, for instance, is the comics equivalent of Popstars? Why is there not a long queue of wannabes proudly showing, in public, that they have

no talent whatsoever yet seeing that as no barrier to success? Sorry, you with your hand up at the back, you want to say something?

"Winner gets exclusive contract with big publisher on grounds of prettiness despite lack of discernible talent. Portfolio review, any convention." Yeah, okay.

Alright; where then is the manufactured supergroup a la The Monkees? (I don't know. You *young* people. The Spice Girls, perhaps? Or Blue?) Where is the group of pretty young things drawn together by a Svengali-like businessman in high-waist trousers purely for the purpose of generating hysteria among pubescents? What? You again?

"Any creative team on **The Authority**". You have a point.

Okay; Dance music. Repetitive beat, hypnotic intensity, addictive nature, usually produced by faceless journeymen or faded superstars, but occasionally brightened up by drug-crazed lunatic geniuses working out of their bedrooms (and their faces).

X what? Grant who?

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Something else the comics game has in common with the music biz: too many unfettered egos. Not so long ago a comicbook that had been shifting borderline cancellation numbers finally got axed. Fair enough; there are too many books out there hanging on by the skin of their teeth. Get rid of 'em, I say, and make room for new things. So the guy who wrote the thing went and posted something somewhere on the net about the cancellation, and in this post he managed to say (and I paraphrase for brevity's sake) that yeah, sales had been sinking since he took over the writing job on the book, but there was too much editorial interference and they cut out all the really good stuff he did and he had to change the character 'cause they told him to and they made him write the character in a way he didn't want to and he had to get involved in too many crossovers and on and on and on…

Hey! You! You wanted the gig, didn't you? You sucked up all

these editorial demands, didn't you? You didn't tell these editors to shove their crossovers, did you? You didn't walk off the book in disgust, did you? No, you damn well didn't. So why don't you just sit down and shut the hell up because you, sir, have absolutely no grounds for complaint. And while you're sat there, why not ponder on the fact that as sales had been in decline for a period directly corresponding to your tenure on the book, maybe the cancellation was down to you being a lousy writer?

Honestly. Some people are just *asking* for broken fingers.

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It's beginning to seem as though every month, as we're pulling together the final threads of the month's issue of **Borderline**, we receive word that an industry veteran has died. Just as we were finishing last issue, word arrived - too late for inclusion - that Chuck Jones had passed away; the day before last issue hit the street we heard we'd lost Spike Milligan. Neither of them strictly "comics" people, but I'd lay good money that the two of them had more influence on more creators than you'd think.

The thing about losing Chuck and Spike (I can't bring myself to think of them as "Jones" and "Milligan") is that, firstly, they were two of the last surviving heroes from my childhood. More importantly, they were two of the last real originals. Nobody has

ever matched the sheer joy bursting out of Chuck's animation; nobody who has seen the face of Wile E. Coyote as he realises that once again he is going to plummet into one of those astonishing Monument-Valley-on-acid canyons could forget it. Nobody has come anywhere near Spike when it comes to pushing the boundaries of humour; nobody could make you question what was actually *funny* and then show you that what you never thought *could* be funny actually *was* funny as beautifully as Spike did.

So I'd like to end this month by asking you something. If Chuck and Spike were among the Last of the Originals, do we have New Originals today? Is there anybody out there, in whatever field, doing something - anything - with the verve and the disregard for convention they had?

Tell me. Mail me at *martin.shipp@borderline.mediahall.co.uk* and maybe next month we'll have better news to share.

** What did you expect? Humour?*

BL

CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Kevin Schomburg's European odyssey goes to... New York?

Will Eisner's Dropsie Avenue: The Neighborhood

"WHO can mark a point at which neighborhoods start to die!" exclaims a tired old lady in a wheelchair, who grew up on Dropsie Avenue, at the end of the book. This is rightly not phrased as a question; the topic of social decay lies at the foundations of Will Eisner's geographical study in comics form.

In 1870, when the story starts up, Dropsie Avenue has mainly Dutch residents. The first scene depicts a family having a discussion about the bad influence of the English, who are slowly starting to move into the neighbourhood. They worry about the devaluation of their property and loss of wages. At the same time a family tragedy can be observed: the uncle of the family, a drunk who worries about his employment, staggers up to an English property one night and sets fire to the cornfield. His niece, who tries to stop him, is burned by accident and dies.

This short first episode sets the tone for the book quite well. Eisner continues to portray the general decline of the neighbourhood through examples of the luck, the tragedy, and the destiny of local individuals and their families over the course of the century. But the book does not become a generational drama in the process. Rather, it relies heavily on the use of more or less interconnected anecdotes (some longer story threads, some only a page long) to paint a believable picture of the goings on in and around the buildings that make up Dropsie Avenue.

"In the end buildings are only buildings, but people make a neighborhood", states one of the book's characters - and it shows. It is ethnic, racial and religious prejudice, and the wish of the established community, the prevailing ethnicity, to maintain the status quo and to preserve their customs, which really furthers the creeping but unavoidable breakdown. Newly arriving immigrants are always met with disapproval and rejection; residents move away out of protest or because they have improved their social position and can afford to live in a better area. This process constitutes the downward spiral into which Dropsie Avenue is sucked. The turn of the century brings the Irish who are disapproved by the English; the 20s bring the Italians; in the 30s it is the Jews from Germany, and poverty following the stock market crash in 1929; and after the war it is crime, corrupt politicians, drugs, and greedy real estate dealers who leave their mark on the neighbourhood.

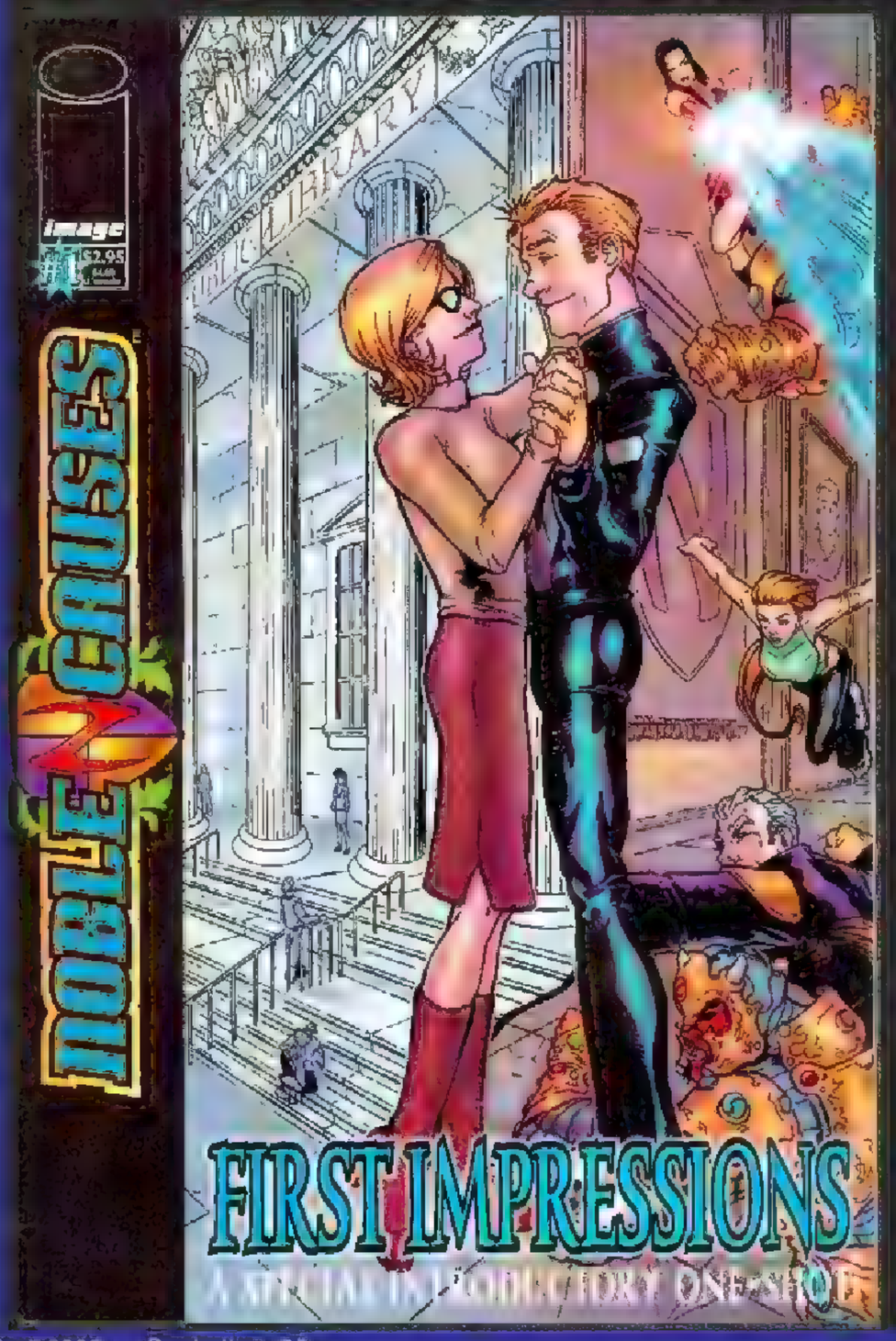
However, it is not the bad influence of different social classes and races that contributes most to the decline (otherwise Eisner's book would have a really questionable message) - it is the apathy which the inhabitants of the area feel towards social improvement and avoidance of moral decay. Except for a few brave individuals like the Jewish lawyer Abie, who marries an Irish Catholic in the 1940s and later runs for the city council, people on Dropsie Avenue are caught up in their struggle for *individual* improvement. Good fortune amounts to personal gain; misfortune is always the fault of others.

Will Eisner's book is a beautiful example for the "broken windows" theory, proposed in a 1982 social study by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling. In their article ***The Police and Neighborhood Safety***, they stated that a community which is in visual disorder will further attract crime and social disorder. The author/artist manages to weave this and more into his tale of an area much like the one he grew up in. "Neighborhoods have lifespans", writes Eisner in the introduction. "They begin, evolve, mature and die." That this process is a sociological one brought about by people is made very clear in **Dropsie Avenue**. Here Eisner mixes his charismatic style of hearty humour and close observation of human behaviour, as displayed in books like **New York: The Big City**, with moving tales of destiny like **A Contract With God**. Street crime and domestic violence are as much its subject matter as council politics and the Vietnam War.

Overall, Eisner achieves in **Dropsie Avenue** a stunning description of the rise and fall of a neighbourhood which runs surprisingly contrary to the American mythologization of the subject of settlement and socialization. The reader is left with a feeling of nostalgia - and the ominous feeling that a life has gone full circle, and is about to start anew according to exactly the same suppositions as before.

Dropsie Avenue: The Neighborhood *is a 176 p. b&w softcover album by Will Eisner, published by DC for $14.95. Other titles by Will Eisner are available as the Will Eisner Library, also from DC.*
Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities *is a 336 page softcover book by George L. Kelling and Cathrine M. Coles, published by Free Press for $14.*

WHY YOU SHOULD BE READING

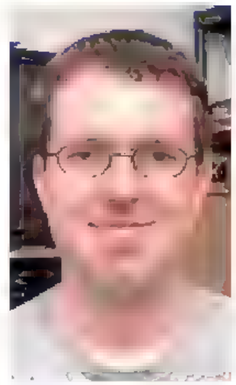


The two Jays... Jay Eales (Borderline news feature maestro) talks to Jay Faerber (boy genius and comics writer before he was out of diapers) about his new bimonthly Image series.

Borderline: Okay, we'll start with the hard sell, for those of our readers who are coming to the party late - Noble Causes - what's it all about, and why do you think that it stands out from the pack?
Jay Faerber: Noble Causes is all about the scandalous lives of the Noble family - the world's most famous superheroes, as seen through the eyes of Liz Donnelly, an ordinary girl who marries into the family in our first issue, only to have her husband get killed on their honeymoon. So now she's sort of trapped within this powerful, volatile, family that's falling apart at the seams following the death of their favorite son. The book's full of backstabbing and in-fighting and secret agendas. And sex. As for why it stands out from the pack, did I mention the sex?

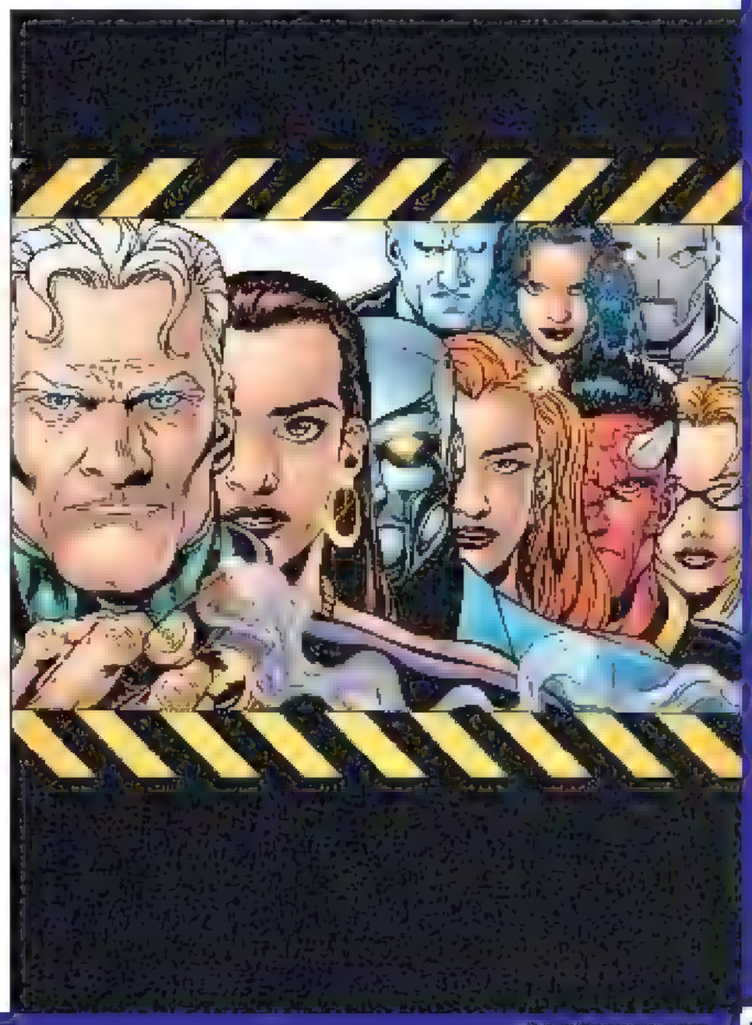
BL: You began with the Noble Causes: First Impressions one-shot before launching the series proper. Was this to test the waters for the series, to gauge reaction before deciding if the audience would be there for an ongoing series, or was it always planned this way?
JF: Yeah, we launched the book with an introductory one-shot in October, followed by the actual series in January. The series was planned all along, but we staggered the launch mainly so, when ordering the ongoing series, retailers would already have the one-shot in their hands, and would know what they're ordering. So the series was going to come out regardless, but we just wanted to try and help the retailers feel a little more secure in ordering it.

BL: Noble Causes has been described as a "superhero soap opera". In broad terms, which shows would you say have been the most influential on the series? Are we talking the ensemble action of a Hill Street Blues *or a* West Wing*, or the family machinations of a* Dallas *or* Dynasty*?*
JF: Well, NC isn't really aping a particular show. It's just inspired by a genre - the daytime soap opera. Most comic fans are loath to admit this, but monthly comics are soap operas. They continue from month to month, with long, rambling storylines. That's all daytime soaps are. I'm just bold (or dumb?) enough to voice the connection out loud. So as far as inspiration goes, the most influential stuff has been the daytime, daily soaps - the stuff



that features a massive cast, and is completely character-driven. Pretty much all the daily soaps have a very powerful, very flawed, family at their center, so that's the format I lifted for NC. But it's not like I set out to model NC after any particular soap, or particular characters.

BL: Tell us how you came upon the format for the book, with a lead strip and back-up in every issue.
JF: It started out as strictly a



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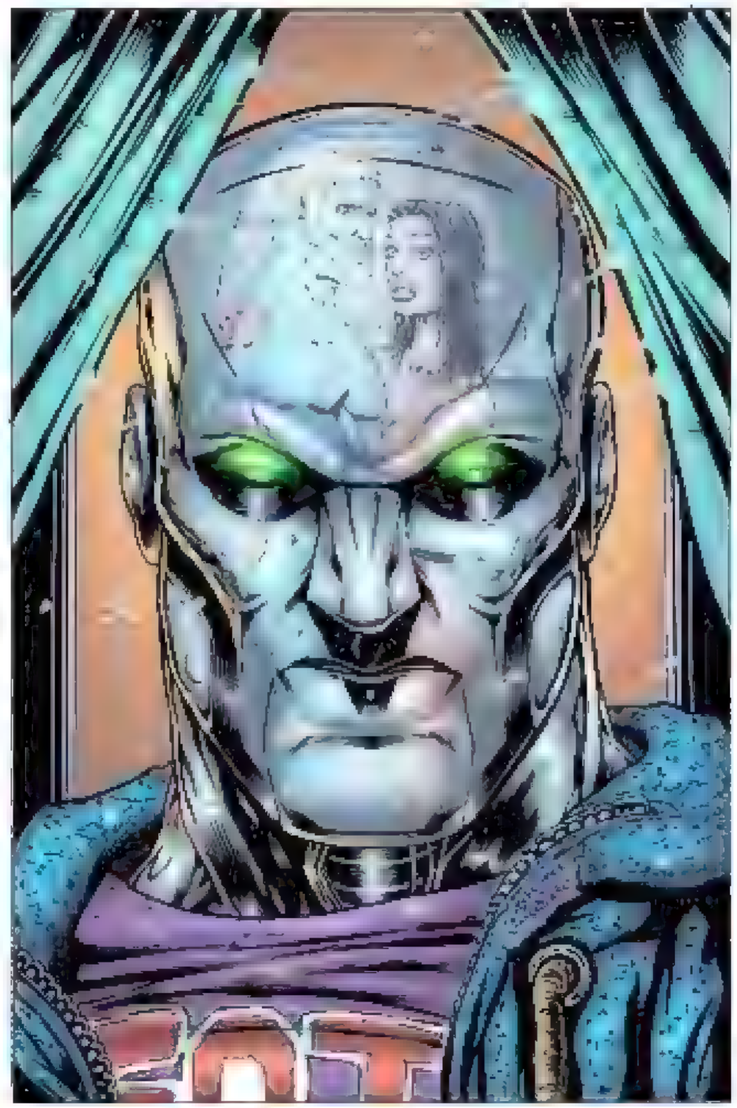
scheduling concern. I know talk is cheap, but I really take the book's schedule seriously (isn't that right, Patrick...?), so I decided to split the book up into two stories, mainly to ease the burden on the lead art team, since they're being asked to draw a comic and not get paid until after it comes out - that's a big lag time. So I instituted the back-ups to take some of the pressure off them. Once I decided to do that, it seemed like a good idea to use the back-ups as a way to flesh out the Noble family, by focusing on key events in their pasts. So far, it's worked really well, and I'm quite happy with the reader reaction to them.

BL: For me, that's the highlight of the book, the way that the back-up strips relate to the lead strip, shedding light on the Noble family's past. It seems amazing that, to date, there have only been two issues, and yet the characters seem familiar, as if I'd been reading about them for years. I assume that was the plan?
JF: I never laid it out that specifically, but yeah, I was hoping that the back-ups would help shed light on the various interpersonal relationships within the comic, since we're just plopping readers down right in the middle.

BL: I understand that before a single page of Noble Causes saw publication, the television rights to the series had been optioned. How did that come to be?
JF: Just happy coincidence, really. Back at Wizard World 2000, I went out to dinner with a bunch of comics guys that I'd never met before. That dinner, quite literally, changed my life. Anthony Bozzi, Image's marketing director, was there, and he was telling me I should pitch a book to Image. Some other Image creators were there as well, and hearing them talk about working on creator-owned material really inspired me - it was like an epiphany. All I could talk about the rest of the con was doing a book at Image. But anyway, also at this dinner was a guy named Ford Gilmore, who wrote the Nightfall comic at Wildstorm, and was dialoguing Gear Station at Image. I don't think I knew it at the time, but Ford's a Hollywood producer. So fast forward about a year, and I'd moved out to LA. Ford heard I was out here, and gave me a ring. We were just chatting, catching up on stuff, and we started talking about Noble Causes. One of Ford's partners overheard his side of the conversation, and when Ford hung up, he asked Ford to fill him in on this book he was talking about. Ford told him, and they decided it'd make a great TV show. So later that day, Ford called me back and asked if it was available. This was all before the one-shot had even gone on sale. When I went in to meet with Ford, I had to bring him crappy copies I'd printed out on my inkjet printer. So now Ford and his guys have it, and they're shopping it around as a weekly series.

BL: It would be kind of ironic to have a comic series inspired by television shows, getting adapted into one. Have you put any thought into your perfect dream cast for Noble Causes *- The TV Show, even for fun?*
JF: I haven't really given it any thought. I have to be realistic - this show will, in all probability, be one of those syndicated sci-fi things, like *Mutant X*. So chances are, I'll never have heard of most of the actors.

BL: The regular art team of Patrick Gleason and John Wycough - how did they become involved? Please excuse my ignorance, but I'm not familiar with either of them.
JF: Believe me, I'm not very familiar with them, either. I found out more than I wanted to know about these two during a trip to Tijuana at last year's San Diego Con. But anyway, I met Pat through our mutual pal, Brian Vaughan. Vaughan introduced us a few years ago, and I'd see Pat at the summer cons. I really liked his stuff, and when I started developing Noble Causes, I thought about asking him, but didn't - at first. See, I know Pat likes drawing big, weird shit, and NC is largely just rich people arguing with each other. So I didn't really think it'd be up his alley. But when our first lead penciller, Billy Dallas Patton, had to bow out, I asked Pat if he'd take over the lead spot, and he agreed. John "Waki" Wycough was turned on to me by Billy. They knew each other online, so when we were looking for inkers, Waki was one of the guys we tried out. He started out inking Pat's back-up in Noble Causes: First Impressions, and when we moved Pat up to the lead spot, Waki moved with him.



BL: Do you have a favourite character yet, and if so, why?
JF: This is such a cliché answer, but I like them all, equally. I do admit to having fun with Celeste, though. She's always good for a glib one-liner. And she's more complex than just the token bitch, too.

BL: What are your hopes for the

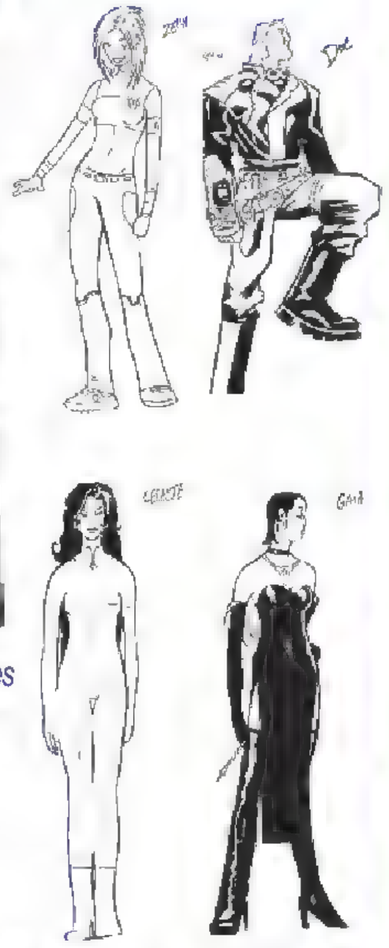
do to keep reminding people about the book.

BL: What sort of creator input can readers expect to find at NoblesWatch?
JF: Well, there's a link to the Noble Causes message board from the site, and pretty much the whole creative team pops in there on a regular basis - me, especially. We also post developmental sketches from Patrick as often as we can.

BL: What's it like working with each other?
JF: Have you ever gone to call someone, and you pick up the phone, only to find out they're already on the line, and were about to call you? Well, it's nothing like that.

But seriously, it's great working with Pat. The coolest part, I think, is watching the covers develop. I usually let him read the script, and I give him a few ideas I have for the cover. But when he turns in his rough thumbnails, he always manages to take my idea and make it much, much cooler. Pat's also a great storyteller, and always keeps his deadlines. I'm enjoying our time working together, since I'm pretty sure he'll get snatched away by Marvel or DC rather soon.

BL: Are there plans to collect Noble Causes in trade paperback, or is it too early to say?
JF: It's too early to say, but we hope to do regular collections of each story arc, like they do with Powers. BL



Pat Gleason's unused cover sketches and character designs for Noble Causes #2 – look out for a Pat Gleason Drawing Board in a forthcoming issue of Borderline

series?
JF: I'm hoping that sales can support us going monthly. That's pretty much it. I just want to put out the book on a monthly basis, and have it pay for itself. If we get rich in the process, great. But this really is just a labor of love for me.

BL: The NoblesWatch website, [www.nobleswatch.com], is already up and running. How important do you think a web presence is to the success of a comic these days?
JF: I think it's pretty important to not only have a website, but to have a web presence - that is, to post on message boards and do a lot of interviews, that sort of thing. Whatever you can

Name: Jay Faerber
Date of Birth: 19th May 1972
Place of Birth: Wilkes-Barre, PA
Base of Operations: Van Nuys, CA
Secret Origin: Faerber grew up in a small town in the coal-mining region of Pennsylvania, and when he realized he didn't look good in black, he decided he wanted to draw comics. When he realized he couldn't draw, he decided he wanted to write them, instead. After graduating with a BA in English from Shippensburg University of PA, Faerber moved to Seattle, where he worked as everything from a security guard to a car salesman. After two years of submitting pitches and bribes to DC and Marvel, Faerber broke into both companies nearly simultaneously, on a **Secret Origins 80-Page Giant** (at DC) and **What If...? #114** (at Marvel). He's worked steadily in comics since, and when his ego and thirst for control grew large enough, he launched his first creator-owned series, **Noble Causes**, with Image Comics. Faerber currently resides in Van Nuys, CA, the porn capital of the nation, where he continues to chronicle the funny, twisted, and addictive saga of the Noble family.

POWER AND LOVE

Is it possible to adapt a massive music-drama into a comics series? Mike Kidson considers P. Craig Russell's adaptation of Wagner's Ring cycle...

MANY delight in it, many despise it – but few who know it would deny that Richard Wagner's operatic cycle **Der Ring des Nibelungen** did much to shape 20th century Western culture and society. Generated by the same industrial, rationalist zeitgeist that produced Darwin's **Origin of Species** and Nietzche's **Also Sprach Zarathustra**, the four operas **The Rhinegold**, **The Valkyrie**, **Siegfried** and **Twilight of the Gods** sidestepped the values of Christianity to offer a philosophical view of human actions and motivations wrapped in a massively resonant version of pagan mythology, and a swirling, sensuous musical score which captured and seduced the attention of audiences throughout Europe and America, while also pointing the way towards modernism. Right across the board, **The Ring** broke centuries-old rules and rewrote them for a new era.

Yet, like many classic works of massive influence, it is today more widely reputed than known – and often its reputation is that of an interminable, heavily Teutonic opus in which overweight "heroes" and "valkyries" waddle around the stage brandishing magic swords, fighting unconvincing dragons and singing incomprehensible words. There's truth in that, too. Even though the constant ebb and flow of the music helps, to watch often bulky singers performing **The Ring** requires enormous, willing suspension of disbelief, even for fans; and just one of its cultural legacies is a sword and sorcery genre which captures the superficial trappings of the story but misses its more subtle and philosophical aspects.

Unfortunately, that is the trap that DC's adaptation of the cycle fell into – although Gil Kane's pencils and Jim Woodring's luscious colours are a delight to behold, the text of the cycle was reduced to a convoluted piece of genre swashbuckling. It can be said at once that P. Craig Russell's adaptation is far more satisfactory and true to its source. But before considering Russell's work, just what is he being true to, and how?

Themes

The Ring began as a sketch for a traditional grand opera, based on incidents in the 13th century epic **The Nibelungenlied**. Wagner then decided that the story needed a prequel, and then another – and, as the story expanded, so did his ambitions. By the time the texts of the four operas had been fully drafted, **The Ring** had become a project intended to transform opera from a lavish entertainment for the aristocracy into the ideal artform, in which visuals, music, poetry and drama were to be of equal importance in conveying to audiences serious discussion of contemporary ideas. During the 20 years it took Wagner to set his texts to music his aims changed considerably; still, the final result was an massive tale of gods, heroes, giants, dwarves and the end of the world, rooted in Teutonic mythology, drenched in the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzche, and couched in a powerful new musical language. Finally, this heady brew of ideas was offered to Germany, as its separate states moved slowly but steadily towards unification, as what Wagner called a "Holy German Art": a supremely nationalist epic for a newly emergent nation.

Given the scope of Wagner's ambitions, it's hardly surprising that his text allows many different interpretations. The most notorious of them was Hitler's vision of it as a celebration of Aryan superiority and Semitic inferiority – and in view of Wagner's own rabid anti-Semitism, it's a reading which cannot be denied. But Russell, like many who are awed by Wagner's achievement in spite of its tainted aspects, has chosen one which is different but just as valid. The wordless opening sequence of his adaptation outlines his reading quite clearly.

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzche both influenced and was influenced by Wagner. Regarding the latter, Bertrand Russell rather tartly said of Nietzche's later theories that "Nietzche's superman is very like Siegfried, except that he knows Greek". However, the larger structure of the Ring story, from which Siegfried emerges as the hero/saviour, is informed by the younger Nietzche's theoretical division of human drives and appetites into the Apollonian, that of the mind and will, and the Dionysian, that of the body and senses. Wagner narrowed (and politicised) that idea into an archetypal conflict between Power (the Apollonian impulse redefined as control through the rule of law) and Love (the free, lawless expression of Dionysian passion). Power and Love are, to Wagner, eternally opposed, and their opposition philosophically underpins the entirety of **The Ring**. Ultimate Power, as symbolised by the golden Ring itself, can only be won by forswearing Love; and the life trajectory of the epic's real protagonist, the god Voton, is summed up in just two lines from Act 2 of The Valkyrie: "Als junger Liebe Lust mir verblich, verlangte nach Macht mein Mut". Russell and his collaborator Patrick Mason's translation of this can be seen just over this page, but it is the opening of his adaptation which reveals the centrality of the Power/Love opposition to this interpretation of the work.

The Ring opens with a long expansion and embellishment of

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WHEN IN MY YOUTH I TURNED FROM LOVE TO POWER I MADLY WON THE WORLD.
MY PROMISES WERE TWISTED BY THE TRICK-STER LOGE-- WHO HAS FLED ME NOW.
YET IN ALL MY POWER, I YEARNED STILL FOR LOVE.

an E Flat Major chord which seems to rise in sonic terms from the primordial depths and eventually becomes a representation of the rushing waters of the River Rhine. Russell has replaced this powerful but abstract musical prelude with a visual approximation of an "overture", constructed from references placed by Wagner throughout the cycle and looking very much like an assemblage of key themes which introduces Russell's slant on **The Ring**.

A drop of liquid falls from an outstretched finger to splash into a pool, which multiplies into a cascade of water. A small plant arises from the cascade, becoming a mighty tree around which the Norns (the Teutonic equivalent of the Fates) weave the story of the world. A shadow is cast over the scene by the arrival of the god Voton; he drinks from the water, raising his head to see a woman, the goddess Fricka, approach. A deal is struck; for the right to take the woman, Voton surrenders his left eye to the Norns, who weave it into their "thread of life". But before stepping towards Fricka, Voton reaches out, horrifies the Norns by tearing a branch off the tree, and shapes it into a spear. As he offers his hand to Fricka the tree sheds its leaves – and our view is drawn in to a patch of blackness at the point where the branch was wrested from its now dead trunk. Superimposed on the blackness, another drop of water falls into another cascade which streams across the page and into the first scene of Wagner's story, the Rhinemaidens frolicking in the waters of the Rhine…

In these five pages of taut, wordless and pastel-shaded symbolism Russell introduces many core themes that will resonate throughout his 14 issue adaptation. The tree is Yggdrasil, the World-Ash, symbol of Life and Nature. Voton, drinking at the water of life, sees Fricka and feels Desire and Love. He gives of himself for Love – but before taking it he wrests and shapes from the tree a symbol of male Power. This is both a contravention of Nature and, if looked at in a Freudian sense, a substitution of an artificial phallus for the natural mode of sexual Love; and so the symbol of Life and Nature, violated, dies. All that follows, then, will be unnatural – a conflict between Love and Power which can only be resolved by the destruction of a world tainted by Power and the rebirth, from Love, of Nature.

Music and Images

None of this is necessarily clear at a first reading of Russell's adaptation - but then, when we first hear an overture before an opera we do not necessarily know how the themes in it relate to the substance of the opera. Which brings us to the biggest question to be asked about the validity of Russell's work here and his manner of approaching it – since Wagner's work is best known and loved not for his stories and philosophies but for his music, is it possible to adapt a work in which music is of central importance into a series of comics? The short answer is no, not entirely; but Wagner's approach to music offers opportunities for visual analogies which Russell has firmly grasped and taken.

And now the long version… The difficulty of conveying music in comics is, I think, a function of the different ways in which we perceive music and images. Music, despite having a very clearly defined technical language, impacts on the listener emotionally and physically. We describe its effects on us in terms of analogies – e.g. "it sent a shiver down my spine", "that dissonance is hair-raising", "it makes me want to dance" – which actually convey nothing about the music itself but tell a good deal about consensual physical and psychic reactions to it. Images may carry a powerful emotional impact, but generally as a secondary reaction following a scan of them and an intellectual comparison of them with our own vocabulary of what things look like – which, of course, is informed by what we see every second our eyes are open! These two modes of perception – aural and visual – and our reactions to them – intellectual and emotional – are so fundamentally different as to make translation of one into the other problematic, to say the least.

Wagner, though, offered a bridge between the two (one which spawned a whole trend in "narrative music"). He took up an idea which Beethoven had tried in

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his Sixth ("Pastoral") Symphony then cast aside; a melodic fragment could serve as a "motif" and be assigned to a person, idea or object. And persons, ideas and objects can be visualised. Musicologist Robert Donington boiled the entire, massive musical substance of **The Ring** down to just over 100 such melodic fragments which, when strung together and embellished so as to create a coherent and dynamic structure, amount to a musical narrative in which aspects of the verbal scenario are commented on, opposed, foreshadowed and reinforced… in a way analogous to how a sequence of pictures can combine with plot and dialogue to create a deeper narrative experience than may sometimes be achievable by image or words alone.

In theory, a comics adaptation of *The Ring* could be constructed by creating an image of each of Wagner's motifs and using it as the visual vocabulary, juxtaposed with the dialogue. In practice such an effort might be fascinating but would probably be somewhat abstract, and also very long. Russell, wisely, has opted to adapt by carefully editing the text, illustrating it, and introducing a number and range of visual motifs – some analogous to Wagner's some of Russell's own devising - which convey important points not covered by the words. One such example is the falling drop of liquid which opens his adaptation, a motif indicting Creation which recurs at appropriate moments in the series. Another is the moment towards the end of **The Rhinegold** when Voton conceives of the Sword as a solution to his difficulties – this, a prime example of an event occurring in Wagner's music but not in his words, is given a whole page of imagery which Russell himself explains in the additional material to issue four of the serial adaptation of that opera. A third kind is seen at the end of the third issue of **The Rhinegold**.

One crucial event in that opera which is not shown by Wagner in the staging or the music but merely described at secondhand is the forging of the Ring itself. So Russell devotes two wordless pages to showing this event in flashback, and inserts them at the point where Voton and Loge, god of fire, descend into the realm of the Nibelungs with the express purpose of stealing the Ring. In the opera itself, the musical depiction of the descent into Nibelheim includes one of Wagner's most startling and innovative musical ideas – a sequence in which the orchestra fades out and is replaced by a purely rhythmic pattern, intended to be played with mallets on eighteen anvils, indicating the work of the Nibelung smiths at their forges. That musical episode has been converted by Russell into the forging of the Ring. Very effectively, he conveys that metallic, rhythmic pattern by laying out the forging in a hard, relentless grid of small square panels which show the deed in close-up – a visual device as strikingly different from his customary flexible, flowing layouts as the sound of the anvils is aurally different from the usual sound of the orchestra.

It is by such devices, then, that Russell incorporates elements of Wagner's musical constructions into a comic. They are, perhaps, as much as can be done to bridge that gulf between music and images without slowing or breaking up the narrative flow which is so important in comics. In other respects he sometimes conveys something of the movement of the music – the intimate scenes between Siegmund and Sieglinde in the first act of **The Valkyrie** are laid out, in terms of panel width and frequency per tier, to match, in a very accelerated way, the rhythms and pauses of the music. By contrast, there is no hint of the abrupt change in musical idiom that occurs between Acts 2 and 3 of **Siegfried** - Wagner abandoned the composition for 10 years, during which he wrote another two operas and developed a flowing, chromatic style quite at odds with his former, more foursquare, constructions. In the opera house that effect is adequately covered by the continued use of familiar motivic material; in a comic the new sensuousness in the music would perhaps require a change in drawing style too broadly dramatic in impact to be justifiable. In such respects what the ear hears and what the eye sees may, it seems, remain incompatible sensations.

Abrief synopsis

If so far I've emphasised the philosophical and symbolic aspects of only the first part of *The Ring* – approximately a quarter of Russell's adaptation! – it's because **The Rhinegold** is a highly dense and rigorously constructed piece which establishes the conceptual background, the majority of the ideas, against which the rest of the cycle is played out. The narrative of the successive three operas is comparatively conventional, except insofar as it amounts to derivations from the ideas established in **The Rhinegold**. Before moving on to consider them, then, a recap of that first opera's themes may be useful.

Russell's introduction, already dealt with, sets the scene of a conflict between the opposed forces of Love and Power. Wagner's own narrative opens with the Nibelung dwarf, Alberich, stealing mystic gold from the Rhine; by cursing and forswearing Love, he is enabled to forge the gold into the symbol of ultimate Power, the Ring. (To interject a Freudian note again – if the spear wrested by Voton from the World-Ash represents a phallic perversion of male sexual force, the Ring may be seen as a symbolic, artificial vagina, symbol of female power perverted.)

To buy his way out of a bad

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bargain by which two giants, Fasolt and Fafner have built for the gods their new dwelling, Valhalla, Voton must steal Alberich's gold – he also wishes to obtain the Ring, thereby nullifying Alberich's control of ultimate Power by claiming it himself. He and the fire god Loge capture Alberich, gaining his treasure and the Ring – but Alberich lays a solemn curse on the Ring, by which all who wield it will live in fear and perish miserably until it returns to him. Voton is persuaded by Erda (the spirit of Mother Earth) to surrender the Ring, as part of the payment to the two giants. Alberich's curse is immediately manifested as the two fight over the Ring and Fafner kills Fasolt, leaving with the loot. The gods enter Valhalla – but Voton is oppressed by the realisation that he has unleashed a curse upon both men and gods which will doom them… and he can do nothing directly to take the Ring from Fafner and return it to its original, innocent state, because the contract he signed, upon his spear, with the two giants cannot be violated by him.

The Valkyrie/ setting and language

The second opera and story sequence, **The Valkyrie**, takes us from the realm of gods and mythical beings inhabiting **The Rhinegold** into that of humankind. Although the operas are often staged in modern or fantastic dress, Russell opts for a more conventional barbaric/early mediaeval setting; appropriately so, given that Wagner derived much of the storyline, the whole style of dialogue, and even the notion of pure Love being opposed to the Power of social order from the mediaeval German epics.

If *The Ring* drew on contemporary philosophy and embodied a new kind of musical language, it was also part of the 19th century European cultural fascination with all things mediaeval. After the fashion of the era, it was not an historical interest in a vanished era so much as a longing for a Golden Age of craft and beauty to counterbalance what so many artists perceived as the grindingly mechanistic cultural values of the Industrial Revolution; and its proponents sought to create new beauties and crafts by *updating* the mediaeval. Just as 19th century Gothic architecture combined mediaeval design with modern techniques and many of William Morris's efforts did the same, so Wagner drew his source material from mediaeval epics such as **The Nibelungenlied**, but rewrote to establish a romantic view of the Middle Ages couched in a language which imitated, but did not replicate, mediaeval German verse forms.

One of the joys of Russell's adaptation is the way it handles the language of the original – and here his longtime scripting collaborator Patrick Mason enters the picture. Working from an English translation, Russell edited down Wagner's enormously wordy text to focus on the points key to his interpretation, then gave the results to Mason, who rendered the German original into an English which retains some of its poetic qualities but lightens them and modernises them. It is something that no modern translator of the full text would dare to do; the idioms of Wagner's mediaevalism are not those of modern English verse. The lines from **The Valkyrie** already cited give the essence of the Wagnerian flavour - "Als junger Liebe Lust mir verblich, verlangte nach Macht mein Mut" – the Old German epic style of a rolling heptameter packed with assonance, alliteration and internal rhythms, applied to the dialect of Wagner's native district, Saxony. Luckily for Mason, he did not have to try to transmute all of this into modern English – moreover, he was able to work in terms of speech patterns clearly assigned to characters via speech balloons, rather than being read cold from the un-illustrated page. Even so, that the result retains something of the assonance and alliteration, a little of the "sprung rhythm" - yet not constantly, so as to lighten the text - and makes it easily comprehensible to the modern reader is a remarkable achievement. Absolutely authentic it may not be – but the flavour is faithful.

To return to the narrative and its themes; the first part of **The Valkyrie** introduces humanity into the cycle, countering the examination of Power in **The Rhinegold** with a vision of unfettered Love in the meeting of Siegmund and Sieglinde. But in part two it is revealed how vulnerable that Love is to the machinations of Power - indeed, how much it is a product of them. Although they speak of "the purity of holy Love", the lovers are Voton's children – they are illegitimate, and their union is incestuous. In moral terms they are a contradiction. Although they represent in its most controversial forms the opposition of free, Dionysian Love to the social order which, in Wagner's view, is Apollonian Power, they are still the offspring of the god whose

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Spear represents and upholds that Power. And so, they are doomed – Voton's desperate, contradictory attempt to create an antidote to the Power of the Ring which falls outside his own control is shattered by the Power which he must himself maintain. This is the import of the long exchange between Voton and his wife Fricka (of all ironies, the goddess of marriage!) which begins part two of the second opera.

It is followed by one of the key scenes in the entire cycle. For narrative purposes Voton explains in detail to his Valkyrie daughter, Brunnhilde (and to the audience) his dilemma and his attempts to break the threat of the Ring. In philosophical terms it is a massive outburst of Schopenhaurean despair - as the upholder of perverted male Power and an incarnation of Schopenhauer's concept of the all pervading and evil Cosmic Will, Voton is forced to face up to his own impotence to change or control destiny. Such is the limitation of Power… and it is beautifully expressed by a combination of expressive lettering, anguished dialogue and clear art in this adaptation's opening to the scene.

Yet the adaptation of the scene as a whole does not quite capture its final meaning – because at this point Russell's apparent reading of the cycle as a conflict between Love and Power begins to recede into the background of Wagner's epic. By the end of the scene Voton has lost – the conflict has, in effect, been abandoned. For the remainder of the cycle it is played out unknowingly by mortals, ending inevitably in the destruction of everything. Obviously it's a major turning point in the interpretation! But Russell is bound to Wagner's text – and that text blurs this reading of the scene, focussing instead on Brunnhilde's attempt to respond to Voton's thwarted desire rather than his intellectual understanding, and on the squabble between them that results. Both that attempt and the squabble are part of Voton's surrender of power – but in comicbook terms the imagery inevitably emphasises the dispute itself rather than its meaning. This is hardly Russell's fault, though; it is perhaps more a demonstration of the limitations of interpretation as applied to an enormous and internally inconsistent work.

Siegfried/heroism

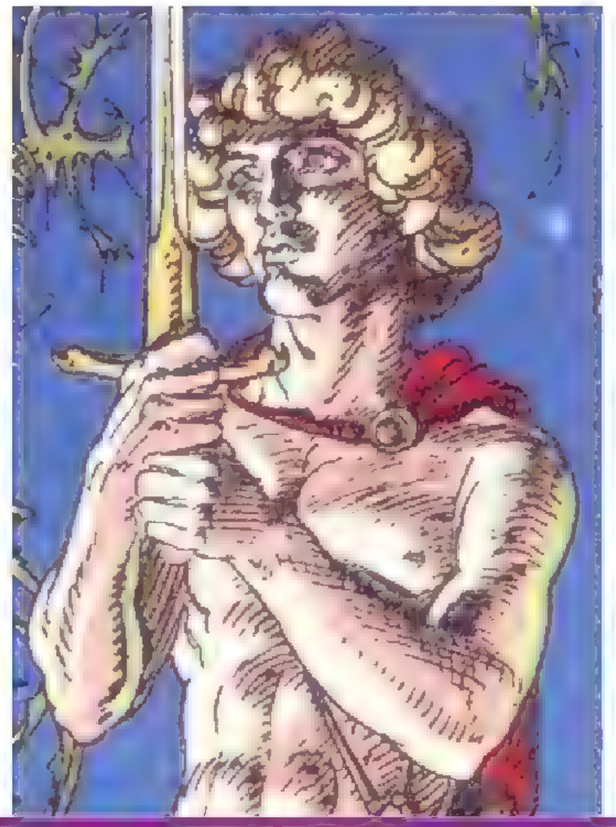
The final part of **The Valkyrie** sets in motion the rest of the cycle. Brunnhilde's attempt to do what Voton *wants* instead of what he *must* is thwarted by Voton himself; the doomed Siegmund is exterminated for the crime against society of incest. Brunnhilde manages to smuggle the pregnant Sieglinde away, but is condemned by a vengeful Voton to lose her immortality and sleep until she is awakened by a hero.

And so, at almost the mid point of the cycle, Siegfried finally takes the stage; the great Wagnerian hero, the lawless outsider who will save both gods and humankind, ostensibly the central character of the drama. Russell's prints of scenes derived from this opera and published in the 1970s and 1980s depicted Siegfried as a slim, attractive curly-haired youth. Now that Russell has produced his complete adaptation of The Ring, this particular reader can enjoy a sense of relief, for here he unflinchingly depicts the great hero as what he undeniably is – an ignorant, hulking brute.

Bertrand Russell's comment that "Nietzche's superman is very like Siegfried, except that he knows Greek" is in fact heavily ironic and written in knowledge of Hitler's interpretation of Nietzsche - knowing Greek, indeed knowing *anything*, makes all the difference between Wagner's hero and Nietzsche's ideal. Even if preconceptions of the superman as an avatar of Nazi ideology are cast aside, this remains the central flaw in Wagner's cycle. There is nothing to suggest that he saw Siegfried as anything other than a child of nature and the superman incarnate, yet to a modern audience he cannot but appear unsympathetic and unlovable. It's to Russell's credit that he does nothing to glamourize his version of Siegfried; yet in doing so, and in working without benefit of the music's uplifting emotional impact, he has little choice but to present this part of the story as a sumptuously illustrated but somewhat unpalatable sword and sorcery epic.

In a linking sequence constructed by Russell to convey information presented by Wagner as flashback, the pregnant Sieglinde wanders aimlessly to the forest where Fafner the giant, who has transformed himself into a dragon by the power of the Ring, guards the treasure paid to him by the gods for the building of Valhalla. She is taken in by Mime, the scheming brother of Alberich, who lurks in the hope of somehow getting the Ring away from Fafner and using it to become master of the world. She dies in giving birth to Siegfried, who is then brought up by Mime. The hero thus grows up away from humankind, isolated, bereft of moral and social values - and also without Love. In **Also Sprach Zarathustra** Nietzche described his superman thus; "Man is something that shall be surpassed. What have you done to surpass him? All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the superman: a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment". Yet that last is what Siegfried is to man; a human animal first glimpsed playing with bears in the woods, later seen talking with birds, knowing nothing of fear nor of any positive emotion except an exuberant self-regard. If he is a hero, it is because of purely physical strength coupled with youth and ignorance; a Conan without cunning.

Still, he reforges his father's broken sword, slays the dragon,

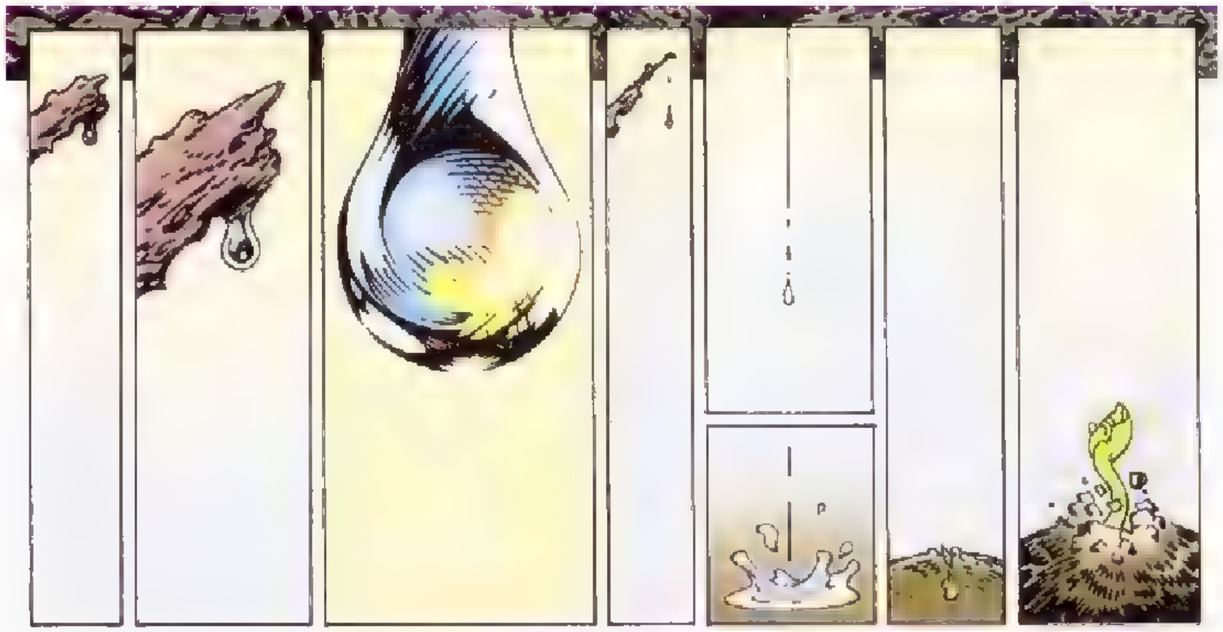


gains the Ring without knowing what it is, symbolically shatters the social order when Voton, in a final act of self-immolation, confronts him, and wins the heroine – although it has been pointed that the great romantic conclusion to the opera actually consists of the hero disappearing into a cave to have sex with his aunt! Russell depicts all of this faithfully and well, although he cannot really convey the mood of musical set pieces such as the "Forest Murmurs" sequence.

In terms of the first half of the cycle Siegfried emerges as a successful revolutionary, and this is most likely how Wagner wished him to be seen. But the question remains; how can anyone truly be a revolutionary if he has no idea what he is revolting against?

Twilight of the Gods/ depiction

If **Siegfried** represents a problematic turn in the narrative for Russell's reading of the story, **Twilight of the Gods** is a problem all round. The final opera of the sequence should be also be its climax and resolution… but in fact it is an immensely long and labyrinthine revenge tragedy full of traditional operatic set pieces and characters who have never been seen before and make little impact upon the audience. It was Wagner's starting point, an adaptation of the events in **The Nibelungenlied**, and the rest of the cycle was then written as backstory; but in its final form it remains, for all its glorious music, an old fashioned "grand opera" of the 1840s with a highly



memorable final scene. It doesn't offer much ground for thematic discussion; but Russell's treatment of it offers a chance to discuss, at last, a major aspect of his adaptation barely touched on as yet, the artwork itself.

The highly ornate and detailed style for which Russell's artwork became famous during the 1970s has been a thing of the past for some time now. He still makes considerable use of photo reference, but the space around his photo-realistic faces and depiction of body language is now more often than not left empty, and his linework is broader and less detailed. A new, "cartoony" style has emerged too, with characters' faces expressing shock reactions with dotted eyes and simply lined mouths; a touch manga influenced, perhaps. The compositions of **The Ring** are full of space – but it is space which is used to point up and maximise the impact of the lines. Underpinning this new, seemingly more spontaneous approach, though, there is still a design sense informed by the decorative tactics of Art Nouveau – while straight lines most certainly have their place in an epic to which a sword and a spear are central concepts, Russell's designs remains essentially curvilinear, drawing the eye around and across the page in loops and spirals.

Although the precise meaning and structures of Wagner's musical set pieces may elude illustration, this curving style is very well suited to the flowing, cadence-driven style of the music as a whole; **The Ring** largely abandons the old operatic style of song (aria) alternating with recitation (recitative), opting instead for a constant flow of sound which Russell's restless pages match well.

The final fifteen pages of **Twilight of the Gods**, wordless except for two small speech balloons, provide a superb sample of his artistry. The end of the opera is wordless too; only music could depict the immolation of Brunnhilde on Siegfried's funeral pyre, the overflowing of the Rhine as the Ring returns to it at last, the burning destruction of the gods and Valhalla and, in the closing bars, a note of hope for renewal and rebirth. Russell rises to the challenge of this massive Armageddon superbly, as does colourist Lovern Kindzierski. Subtly gradiented hues are applied to layouts which open out to give epic scale to the larger events and encompass small insets to focus in on the smaller deeds of the last surviving characters. Square panels are filled with curving, rushing patterns of fire and water, their size varied to manipulate the readers' sense of scale and importance. The lines are strong, yet with a delicate strength, and clear. All of these techniques combine in a flurry of images which serve to tie up the remaining threads of plot… and at the last they revert to the motif of the falling drop of liquid which began the whole adaptation, this time falling upon a ravaged, lifeless landscape to stimulate, once again, a small plant which grows into a radiant but this time symmetrical tree – Nature not at odds with the Power of order any longer but encompassing it. It is a stunning finale to a remarkable adaptation of a flawed but terribly significant work.

Coda

I approached Craig Russell's adaptation of **The Ring of the Nibelung** with some trepidation. He has adopted numerous operas in past years, but in most cases has focussed on the text rather than the music – nor have I found much music in them. Knowing of **The Ring**'s motivic structure and how that lends itself to visualisation of imagery, I hoped against hope that he would grasp the opportunity to at last bring the music to life in an opera adaptation; I haven't been disappointed. If Wagner's set pieces are missing, if the flaws inherent to this four opera colossus have not been overcome… these are minor considerations compared to an achievement which, by and large, is true to Wagner's work, or at least to one artist's vision of it. Mason's dialogue, Kindzierski's colours and Galen Showman's highly expressive lettering are as important to the adaptation as is fine singing to a production of the operas; but in the end this must surely stand as P. Craig Russell's magnum opus. And as a superb and highly readable treatment of a culturally important artwork it is deserving of all the recognition it may receive.

*The trade collection **The Ring of the Nibelung Vol. 1: The Rhinegold & The Valkyrie** is published by Dark Horse Comics on April 3.*

BL

ALL IN A GOOD CAUSE

WHOEVER follows the comics market will be sure to know of Jim McLauchlin, editor of the comics magazine Wizard, *for which he takes care, among other things, of the letter column* Magic Words. *But since 2000, Jim has also been in the front line with ACTOR (the acronym of A Commitment To Our Roots), an association that is devoted to helping authors of comic strips who are in financial difficulties. Gianluca Piredda met Jim and talked with him about the ACTOR initiative and his job for* Wizard.

THE JIM McLAUCHLIN INTERVIEW

On ACTOR

Gianluca Piredda: How did the need for an association such as ACTOR come about?

Jim McLauchlin: Many creators who worked in the Golden Age and Silver Age of comics worked for low pay, often with no benefits or retirement plans. Many of these creators are now older, and may be experiencing medical difficulties. There are a great number of creators who founded the comics landscape we enjoy today, and they may need a helping hand.

GP: What's your goal?

JM: ACTOR exists to provide financial assistance to comic creators who need money for medical expenses or quality-of-life issues, such as food and housing.

GP: When we talk about ACTOR I get the impression that you guys are very dedicated to this operation – that's an excellent thing. But why does ACTOR mean so much for you?

JM: I used to be a sports writer, and major league baseball has a similar organization that helps out old players and coaches. I always thought it was an admirable organization, and I always supported it however I could. It just seemed to me that there should be a similar fund for the comics field. Simply put, it's the right thing to do.

GP: How have receipts for 2001 been? Are you satisfied with them?

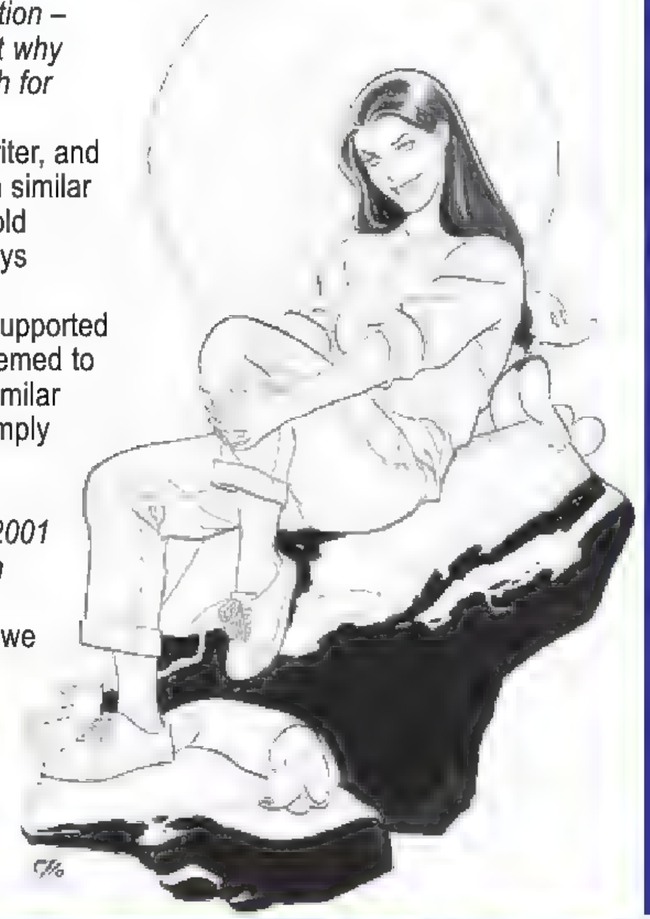
JM: Very satisfied. In 2001, we raised over $130,000.

GP: There are many creators in need?

JM: That's the thing - no-one really knows for sure. If anyone knows of a comic creator in need, I'd encourage them to contact us, and we'll review their case.

GP: How can people help ACTOR?

JM: With money, material, and time. Money: ACTOR always thankfully and graciously accepts monetary donations via cash, check or money order. Please send to: ACTOR, 11301 Olympic Blvd., #587 Los Angeles, CA 90064
Material: ACTOR runs two major charity auctions per year, at the [Florida] Orlando MegaCon in spring and Wizard World Chicago in late summer. If you are a comics artist looking to make a donation to our next auction, please send your donation of art to the same address



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listed above.
Time: ACTOR needs trustworthy volunteers to run booths at comic conventions. If you can help by donating time, please write to the address above, or fax ACTOR at 775-993-1603.

GP: ACTOR has a nice web site. How can surfers help you?
JM: Pretty much the same as above! Check out the Website at: *www.ACTORComicFund.org*

GP: About the site; I saw a great online auction with some fine original pages up for bidding. What other stuff might comics fans find in the auctions?
JM: The last auction, at the Orlando MegaCon on Feb. 23, 2002, featured 177 lots. Art donations from Michael Avon Oeming, Salvador Larroca, Frank Quitely, Butch Guice, Adam Warren, Leonard Kirk, Jim Lee, Greg Land, Joe Quesada, Adam Hughes, Frank Cho, Mike Kunkel, Dave Johnson, John Romita Sr., Marc Silvestri, Dave Gibbons, John McCrea, Howard Chaykin, Kevin O'Neill, Randy Green, Sam Glanzman, Erik Larsen, Ed McGuinness, Dan Brereton, Andy Park and more were available. Bidders can also bid on things like signed books from Alan Moore, and even a day at CrossGen Comics.

GP: I think creators and other people who help ACTOR deserve a round of applause. Anyone in particular you want to nominate?
JM: All the artists listed above who made contributions, and others such as George Perez, Joseph Michael Linsner and Alex Ross. Michael Chabon, the award-winning novelist who wrote The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay, has also made contributions.

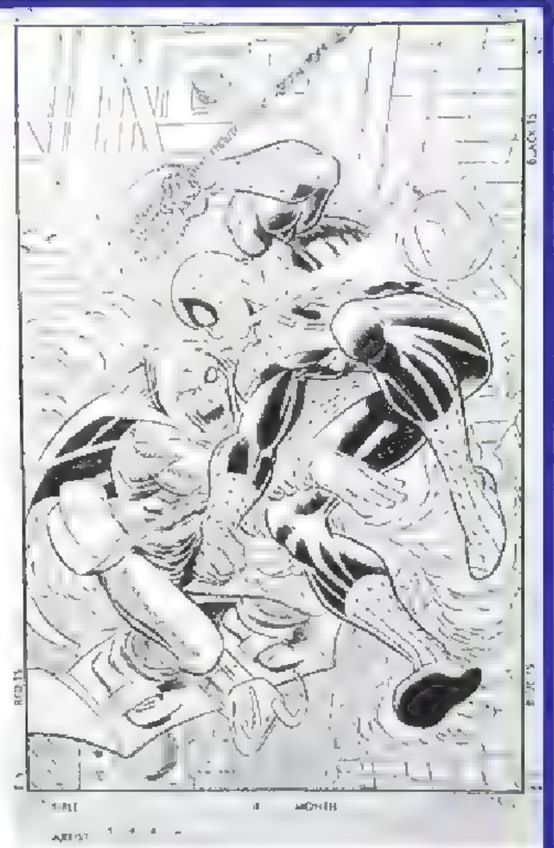
On Wizard
GP: There are other associations that try to fight the censorship of comics and to ensure liberty of expression. What do you think of the fact that Joe Quesada took the Comics Code off Marvel books? Is that positive or negative to you?
JM: Personally, I like the fact that Marvel has ditched the Comics Code Authority. It was born out of an era 50 years ago, and has only been amended once. It doesn't apply in today's world.

GP: Sometimes indie publishers accuse Wizard *of ignoring the independent market and talking only about majors. How would you comment on that?*
JM: Well, Marvel plus DC plus Image account for about 80% of the comics market, at least in the United States. I don't know about Italy. I'd guess we probably spend about 80% of our time on that. It seems an appropriate way to do things. We've been very supportive of smaller books, also. Ask Stan Sakai what he thinks about our coverage of Usagi Yojimbo or Mark Crilley what he thinks about coverage on Akiko and I'm sure they'll tell you we're very supportive.

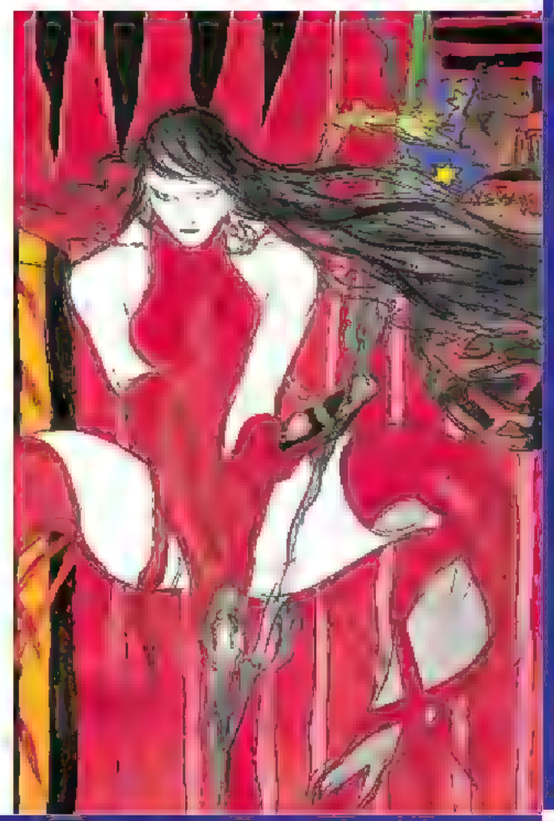
GP: Another accusation I heard concerns the Black Bull productions. Someone thinks there's a conflict of interests there. Any comment about it?
JM: Black Bull is a very small publisher. They get a very small amount of coverage. Again, I think they get what is appropriate to what they are.

GP: You made an appearance in Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back, *the recent Kevin Smith movie. What's your role?*
JM: I play a "clapper/loader," one of the guys who claps the slate and loads film in the camera. There's a fictional sequel to *Good Will Hunting* in the movie, and I'm clapper/loader for that scene. I think I have a whopping two lines.

GP: I think working in a movie, whatever the role or the importance of the role, is a great experience.



Artwork either already sold or up for auction with ACTOR.



Click on Globe returns to contents

How did you enjoy it?
JM: It was a lot of fun! It also made me very nervous! I was very afraid of not doing well, as I'm not an actor - I'm a writer.
GP: How is Kevin on the set? Is he a severe director or is it amusing working with him?
JM: He's a great leader, and he leads by being your friend. He's not severe at all. When he tells someone to do something, they do it. But they do it because they really want to, to help Kevin and to help the movie. Kevin is a very nice guy.

GP: What was the last movie you saw? Did you like it?
JM: I just saw *Analyze This*, a comedy. I enjoyed it a lot.

GP: Jim, you're well known for the Magic Words *lettercolumn. What's the weirdest letter you ever received?*
JM: I once got a letter from a woman who also sent nude photographs of herself. She also had a foot fetish. She wanted me to suck her toes!

GP: You started your career as a comics retailer and then you became the editor of one of the best selling comics magazines in the world. How did you make the big jump?
JM: Again, sports writing was the middle step. *Wizard* started a sports magazine in 1992, and I started working for the company there.

GP: Wizard *started as a fanzine before becoming a best-selling magazine. What's the recipe for cooking up a comics magazine like yours?*
JM: Always be true to the fans and the readers. I think we write in a "voice" that all fans can understand and identify with, because it's their voice as well.

GP: To finish off this interview, do you have an appeal to comics fans for help for ACTOR?
JM: Send money! In January alone, we've already sent $9500 worth of funds to worthy recipients who need our help.

(Borderline encourages its readers to support ACTOR and we would like to thank Gianluca Piredda for permission to run this interview.) BL

AN ACTOR'S LIFE FOR ME

ACTOR, A Commitment To Our Roots, is the first-ever federally chartered not-for profit corporation dedicated strictly to helping comicbook creators in need.

In late 2000, a small consortium of US comics publishers had the idea of creating a financial safety net for comic creators, much in the same fashion that exists in almost any other trade, from plumbing to pottery. CrossGen Comics donated the time and money to get the extensive legal paperwork rolling, and by March of 2001, the US federal government had approved ACTOR as a publicly supported not-for-profit corporation.

ACTOR creates a financial safety net for former comics creators who may need emergency medical aid, financial support for essentials of life, and/or a way back into paying work.

It exists because many Golden Age or Silver Age creators worked in comics' earlier days for low pay and without any pension plan. Very often, writers would work for a penny a word, or artists for $5 a page, with no chance of ownership and no pension. Today, many of those people who laid the groundwork for today's comics industry may be in financial need. Be it due to age, health, or just low salaries with no retirement plan, they may need a hand.

ACTOR has a six-member Disbursement Committee made up from some of US comics' most respected creators: Dick Giordano, Joe Kubert, Dennis O'Neil, George Pérez, John Romita Sr. and Roy Thomas. These members constitute a peer-group board that will hear petitions and disburse funds to worthy applicants. George Pérez and Roy Thomas are the co-chairs of the board.

To be eligible for financial assistance from ACTOR, an applicant must have been a working comic book writer, penciller, inker, colourist, or letterer on a work-for-hire basis for no less than 10 years since January 1, 1934.

Applicants or their authorized representatives must demonstrate to the Disbursement Committee adequate evidence of financial need via verbal and written documentation. Requests from representatives of the applicant shall be made only with the express permission of the applicant in question.

VERDICT COMICS REVIEWS

THIS MONTH'S JURY:

Andy Cheverton
Rol Hirst
Mike Kidson
Nigel Lowrey
Neil McOnie
Nigel Quinlan
Mike Sivier...
but not Kelvin Green who we forgot to mention two months running...

Would you like to join our reviews team – The Borderline Psychotics? All you have to do is send a sample of two reviews to Andy Winter: reviews@borderline.mediahall.co.uk and he'll get in touch!

Angry Youth Comix #3
Fantagraphics
By Johnny Ryan

Now, this may not be for everybody. If a page of gags collectively entitled *My Dad Went to a Concentration Camp and it was Okay* doesn't sound like your thing, then steer clear. If a strip called *Islamic Terrorist Spring Break*, wherein Afghans hijack a plane and crash it onto Daytona Beach, fails to spark your interest then read no further. For the couple of dozen people still with me, read on.

This is quite accurately an angry comic. But where most youthful anger is merely hateful and undirected, this work seems quite intent on its targets, while still leaving the reader to do their share in working out whatever message Ryan is trying to put across. Those who would criticise the Concentration Camp gags would be hard put to do so in the light of such "acceptable" fare as Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*, a film in which many of Ryan's gags would not be out of place. The terrorist strip is not only meant for those who find the current political climate hypocritical and dangerous, but also to anger others into looking more closely at exactly what they claim to be standing for. Fine work.

And there're some fine shit and fart gags on the back page for those who find thinking a little difficult.
The Verdict: The sort of thing that politically correct intellectuals will either dismiss out of hand without a second thought or get incredibly offended and militant about. Luckily, they don't choose to buy comics. (AC)

Bone #46
Cartoon Books
By Jeff Smith

Lost touch with the fun of reading comics? Not quite getting the thrill from them that you used to?

Read the first six or so pages of this little gem, in which heroes Fone Bone and Phoney Bone get into a fight with a giant bee in the market square of the fantasy city of Atheia. That ought to restore your flagging faith.

You can find right here a lot of what comics are about. Exaggerated body language and facial expressions, weird situations handled in offbeat ways - it's fun, y'know?

There is a bigger story going on here but if you're au fait with the Bone saga it's not worth bothering you with it. The whole shemozzle is coming to a head in the previously mentioned walled city of Atheia - according to the interview at the back of the book - so if you start picking Bone up right now, you'll be in time for the build-up to the big climax.
The Verdict: A tonic - but that doesn't mean you should get hooked on gin to read it. (MS)

Catwoman #4
DC
Ed Brubaker and Darwyn Cooke

This issue brings to a close Brubaker's first storyline and marks Cooke's final appearance as regular artist. It has been a great success for both creators; Cooke has lent the story fluidity reminiscent of the Batman Adventures comics and a darkness that holds the story perfectly between entertainment and melodrama; Brubaker has taken a second-tier supporting character and returned her to her Year One roots whilst simultaneously reinventing her.

This Selina Kyle has all of the Frank Miller savvy, but nicely tempered with the experience of the modern Catwoman, making her a sympathetic heroine with all of the edginess concomitant with the Batman, which is good if you want to enjoy Brubaker's scripting without being tied to a multitude of other Batman comics.
The Verdict: An almost complete reinvention of the character that pays respect to all of the previous incarnations in a finely written and illustrated package. (AC)

Cerebus #275
Aardvark-Vanaheim
By Dave Sim and Gerhard

Cerebus discovers a weird kind of block-democracy in a segment, the message of which may in fact be revealed in the letters column: "Scripture is not supposed to be a multiple choice exam".

It turns out his not so fantastically loyal Cerebites, loosely interpreting the last words of the prophet Rick, have long since decided they will vote on anything they are asked to do - and all votes will be considered unanimous in favour of the winning side.

So whatever they decide to do, they all do it together - even those who don't want to.

As a result, when Cerebus discovers they all went to a weenie roast rather than to hear his great rallying speech, he ends up punching himself repeatedly in the head before going back to bed.

Then he decides to write some scripture of his own.

Will he cause a schism amongst the Cerebites? Probably. We'll have to wait and see.

Of almost equal interest this issue is the debate on punishing wayward children, running in the letters pages.
The Verdict: If you're not offended by Sim's anti-feminist attitude, there's some great comedy in the strip. If you are offended by it, you can always pit your wits against him in the lettercol. (MS)

Courtney Crumrin and the Night Things #1
Oni Press
By Ted Naifeh

A teenage girl goes to live in a

strange house with her strange uncle and her parents, who don't understand her or pay her much attention at all. She has trouble fitting in at school, befriending only one rather sad and wimpy boy, and becomes natural prey for the resident bullies. But at night, strange things happen in the house, odd creatures lurk in the shadows and peer at her from the bottom of her bed...

So starts Ted Naifeh's new miniseries; and so, frankly, start a thousand other stories for children, teenagers and even for grown-ups. Once you've got past the gorgeously coloured cover, the first thing that strikes you is that the story is studiously avoiding veering off this well-worn track. Even the preview of the next issue made me wince slightly: Courtney (our fish-out-of-water heroine) uses a magic spell to make herself popular. Even if this hadn't been the plot of one of the better *Buffy* episodes, it's still a long way from original. And that's a pity, because everything else about this comic is just so good – from the art and the character design (Courtney has this huge, moon-like face and the chief bully looks like an evil Alice) to the dialogue, which is very sharp and oddly contrasted by the more traditional narrative voice. A stronger, more original story could have kicked this into the stratosphere, but instead the awkward clichés are shown up by the quality of everything else. Still, it is Naifeh's first attempt at writing, so it's to be hoped he might get more adventurous as the series progresses.

The Verdict: Great art is let down slightly by a rather pedestrian attempt at a suburban fairytale. Shows a lot of promise, though. (NQ)

Evil Eye #9
Fantagraphics
By Richard Sala

Now this is what every comic should be like. Murder, mystery, intrigue, and skimpily dressed pirates battling with deranged hand puppets, underwater monsters and, of course, rats. What else could it be but part nine of *Reflection in a Glass Scorpion*, rapidly approaching its denouement? Who is the horrible creature behind Aunt Azalea? What does he want with Ibex? Will our obnoxious, snoopy heroine Nancy Drood outwit, out-talk and out-fight the numerous homicidal freaks between her and the answers to all these mysteries? And for heaven's sake what's happened to Kaspar?

There isn't a whole lot for the neophyte to go on here, but it all makes sense, of a sort. Sala's art and story go back to the sort of films they were making in pre-War Germany, such as *M* or *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*. It's not noir, it's noir's more interesting older brother. Eerie, convoluted tales of horror and psychosis with characters that look like deformed mutations and settings like darkened streets or rat-filled tunnels under pirate museums. It's also very funny.

The back-up story is another demented tale of Peculia and her nemesis, or possibly lover, Obscurus. These just don't make sense at all, but then again, they never do. They are, however, a lot of fun.

The Verdict: Sala's stories should be morbid and grim, but his talent for strange caricatures and sly storytelling makes Evil Eye thoroughly enjoyable. (NQ)

Finder #25
Light Speed Press
By Carla Speed McNeil

This is part three of the *Dream Sequence* story line, and while new readers might have a hard time working out what's going on, don't worry. Long-time readers are having a similar problem. And that's not a criticism.

Elsewhere is a virtual reality wonderworld which exists solely in the imagination of a single individual: Magri. People pay for the privilege of exploring this dream world, making it a hugely lucrative business venture. There's a fly in the ointment, however. Someone or something is invading Elsewhere and wreaking violent havoc on everyone he finds there, leading to disquieting consequences out in the real world. This invader bears a suspicious resemblance to Jaeger, the Finder of the title, but what he's doing, why and how all remain a mystery.

Baffling though it may be, the story is clearly building up to something, and we're in good hands with Carla Speed McNeil, who gets better with every issue. Her story-telling is terrific, but this particular story-line shows off her incredible talent for haunting imagery. Lots of visual references to other comics, too. The "Can we ask some stuff?" Russian Roulette pages are a sheer joy, but it's the final page that should cause the hairs on the back of the neck to rise.

The Verdict: A top science fiction title, enjoyably different. (NQ)

Happy
Top Shelf
By Josh Simmons

Happy? Yes, all three stories in this beautifully produced little booklet are about happiness – but in a very intense kind of way that doesn't exactly leave you bursting with joy.

It starts out looking as though it will, with *Planet Soft*, a story about a planet swarming with ecstatically happy bunny rabbits busy being, ah, ecstatically happy... Simmons' dark, dense linework put something of a visual edge into an otherwise deliberately fluffy antidote to the usual SF stories about hideous alien monsters. The closer, *Boy and Girl In Love*, follows the same kind of lines; but the manic expressionism of the cartooning, all exaggerated poses, distended eyeballs and huge mouths full of glinting teeth as Boy and Girl repeatedly tell each other how much they love each other, suggest that Simmons might just be taking the mickey a bit...

It's easier to assume that after having read the central story, *Classroom Hi-Jinx*, in which an All American Golden Boy expounds to his class at great length on how marvellous school is, also taking time to point out how thoroughly wretched the class nerds and geeks are. As the only story here to be remotely realistic, it's easy to assume that it's satirical... but it's never quite clear that it is. All one can be sure of is that it leaves you feeling that happiness can often be quite cruel to those who don't feel it.

Overall there's no apparent message or meaning – the book seems to be just a divertissement on a theme. There's no reason why it should be anything else, of course – but it leaves a slight sense of unease lingering in the memory long after it's finished. Perhaps that's its point.

The Verdict: Clever, stylish and unfathomable entertainment. (MK)

I Love New York
Linsner.com
By Joe Michael Linsner

Another Twin Towers benefit book,

but possibly the best of them. In an autobiographical tale of how Linsner, a lifelong New Yorker, came to hear of and realise the impact of the terrorist attacks of September 11. Linsner's art is crisp and appealing, reminiscent of Eric Shanower without the colour work seen in Dawn, but of course it is the subject matter that holds the interest here. Linsner presents an honest snapshot of that period, removed from the tragedy and hysteria surrounding Ground Zero. It's not without its faults (the line "I heard thousands of human voices meeting their ends like human cold cuts in a concrete sandwich of death" particularly jars; so outlandish a comment) but overall, the writing is sober, well tempered and insightful.
The Verdict: A well produced account of the average person witnessing the world's largest terrorist attack that manages to convey the emotion of the time without resorting to "movie of the week" over-dramatisation. (NL)

Just Imagine Stan Lee with John Byrne Creating Robin
DC
By Stan Lee, John Byrne and Terry Austin

Oh. My. God. Where do I start? From its feeble premise (an orphan is named Robin because one flew onto his cot as a child and now he sees them around sometimes...I'm not making this up!) to its dull plot which is best described as "Robin fights Batman because he is told to by the villain, then decides not to", this is among the most boring and directionless comics I've ever read, with its plot strands ultimately leading nowhere. To make matters worse, it's a horrifying thing to see

the once stellar Uncanny X-Men art team of Byrne and Austin just *hacking* their stuff out...Austin seems to be inking with a bingo marker now but most blame must be put at Byrne's door because other than still showing a nice flair in camera angles, it's obvious he is putting no effort in...four pages have no backgrounds whatsoever and many others have only a panel or two with any background. If the creators don't care, why should the readers? Even the back-up art from the great John Severin and the unusual rear cover design fail to save this issue.
The Verdict: It's harsh, but one word sums it up: intolerable. (NL)

Kissing Chaos #8
Oni Press
By Arthur Dela Cruz

This extra-sized issue brings the series to an end, finishing the story off at a legitimate point that's also wonderfully close to where it began. This will make a fine collection in one of those undersized trades of which Oni makes a habit, and that is where the story will possibly read better, in one long uninterrupted stream, where the reader remembers enough of how the tale began to truly appreciate where it ends.

Dela Cruz has steered his cast confidently through their adventure, with motivations and developments clearly portrayed, allowing the story to take on its own life beyond the page, as undercurrents tell as much of what is happening as what is stated explicitly.
The Verdict: High quality and assured storytelling for a newcomer, steered into publication with confidence and élan, something at which Oni has become a leading light in the industry. (AC)

Midnight Nation #10
Joe's Comics
By J Michael Straczynski and Gary Frank

David succumbs to his Walker side while his adversary crucifies Laurel.

The situation might look bad as we approach the end of this series, but the artwork looks fantastic and the philosophy fuelling the adversary is well-explored.

The trouble with it all is, it's a bit slow-moving.
Scratch that. Let's face it, Midnight Nation is S-L-O-W. There'll need to be a really big payoff at the end to justify readers following it.

This comic also features a flip-book preview of *Jeremiah*, JMS's new television series. Gosh.
The Verdict: The slow story would make this a chore if not for Frank's gorgeous artwork. (MS)

Muties #2
Marvel
By Karl Bollers and Patrick Spaziante

A huge retrograde step after the inventiveness of the previous issue, this looks and reads like Marvel shelf filler the world over. Where last issue used a classic old-style painting approach to tell a very modern story, here we have an entirely predictable tale of retribution based on equal parts of Stephen King's Carrie and his short story *Battleground*. The story is set in Japan, so the art is drawn manga-style, which is all that can be said about it.
The Verdict: Massively disappointing in contrast to the first issue, and still unremarkable when judged on its own merits. (AC)

The Order #1
Marvel
By Kurt Busiek, Jo Duffy, Matt Haley and Dan Panosian

Effectively re-launching The Defenders in the wake of penciller Erik Larsen's departure, this project has a very interesting concept. The first tier of original Defenders (Dr Strange, Namor, Hulk and the Silver Surfer) are cursed to come together and defend Earth in times of need. Sick of this disruption in their lives, the team decides to impose order on Earth so that they will not be needed constantly. However, the second tier of Defenders (Nighthawk, Hellcat and Valkyrie) disagree and try to stop their former colleagues... but how do you defeat the zeniths of cosmic power, mystical arts, sheer strength and pure rage? While the concept is good, the

execution isn't... the plot is slow and unexciting and the pencils of Haley, not his best, are robbed of any appeal under the sloppy inks of Dan Panosian. Nice cover by Carlos Pacheco though.
The Verdict: After the successful revamp of the Avengers, Marvel has again dropped the ball with its reintroduction of the Defenders, despite the fan-favourite characters being present... third time lucky, Marvel? (NL)

Queen and Country #6
Oni Press
By Greg Rucka, Brian Hurtt, Christina Norrie

Oni's top-notch espionage comic continues with its second storyline, a brave and relevant look at pre-September 11 Afghanistan. Given the difficulties involved in operating a female agent under the noses of the Taliban regime, this requires standing down capable but troubled central character, Tara Chace.

Rucka skilfully splits the narrative, sending male agents – or "Minders" – Wallace and Kittering to Kabul to retrieve an important package, while Chace is forced to confront the trauma inflicted by a previous operation with a psychologist. Critics of Marvel's Alias should note that at one point she indulges in a bout of loveless sex with a complete stranger she picks up in a bar and fails to provoke moral outrage amongst the readership.

Set in Britain, consciously modelled after an old BBC spy series and clearly influenced by John Le Carré, this is an incredibly strong title: gritty, tense and tough stories with characters to match and a keen sense of pace and eye for detail. While Chace paces her doctor's office, wracked with frustration, her partners bribe border guards and witness a staged execution all the time under casual surveillance. Queen and Country is bimonthly, so the wait between issues is annoying, but the good news is it's set to go monthly in May. An essential read.
The Verdict: Hard-hitting action and espionage for the intelligent and discriminating reader. (NQ)

The Sandwalk Adventures #2
Active Synapse
By Jay Hosler

Mara is a follicle mite, a tiny teensie little bug living in the eyebrow of a certain Charles Darwin. Mara knows him as the god, Flycatcher, and every night all the little mites gather round and exchange stories about Flycatcher and his mighty deeds, such as being struck by the pebble of perception by Ly-ell the god of earth and rock, who also paved the legendary smooth stone path of understanding. That, however, was before Mara suddenly found herself able to converse with her god, a god who is not only slightly bemused to find himself having a conversation with something living in his eyebrow, but who is also determined to set her straight on several small matters, starting with his entire life story.

A mighty interesting life it is, too. Darwin as a young man travels to South America, embarking on assorted expeditions in search of specimens of living and dead animals, sowing the seeds for what will eventually become his grand theory of evolution. The mites struggle to reconcile these comparatively mundane facts with their more colourful and epic myths, while Darwin tries to express the real

Paradigm #1
Two Irish Guys Press
By Matthew Cashel and Jeremy Haun

I haven't the slightest notion what prompted me to order this from the *Previews* catalogue, but I'm glad I did. It opens with an effective shocker as Chris and Emma emerge from a cinema to be confronted by an armed mugger. Something very unexpected happens. This seems to be the catalyst for Chris's life to suddenly go subtly out of joint. He is forced to reassess his on-again off-again relationship with Emma, which by and large seems to revolve around sit-coms and ad breaks. He encounters an odd Englishman on the street. His cat may have started talking to him. And all of this is only preliminary to the literal curtain raiser on the last page.

The blurb on the back of this comic is particularly apposite as it comes from Gary Spencer Millidge. Strangehaven and Paradigm share a certain "what the hell is going on here" tone, a sense of dark and violent undercurrents ripping along under the placid surface of everyday life. There's also the rather wonderful black and white art drawn from photographic models, which makes it also reminiscent of Brian Michael Bendis, and which is equally effective in scenes of disturbing violence or long conversations or simply conveying a lingering unease.

Impossible to say where it's going, but it's probably going to be worth going along for the ride.
The Verdict: An exciting, intriguing new title, providing 40 pages of story and art for three dollars, which is darn good value in this day and age. (NQ)

There isn't a word for that feeling you get when you read a comic from two creators who are entirely unknown to you, yet who manage – separately and in collaboration – to produce a work of such professionalism and freshness that they could have been producing comics for decades. The French would have a word for it, but here my English fails me.

The cover is sharp and eye-catching, if a little over-designed (which may be no bad thing where most mainstream comics have covers that are barely designed at all), and the main illustration is beautifully done. Inside we have a story wherein fantasy blurs over into reality, and comics and sitcoms inform the worldview, lending mage-like advice to the wary traveller. The amount of plot, background and sheer character Cashel brings to these 34 pages is amazing, and his dialogue is natural and inventive, reminiscent of Bendis (although even he didn't debut with the quality on show here). Haun's art is the most attractive black-and-white - with shades of Gary Spencer Millidge and Dean Haspiel – and his panels are sharp and clear. Some of the storytelling goes a little wonky at times, but for a first comic this is sterling stuff.

Each creator adds two pages of editorial, both coming across well with a publishing plan that is admirable (they're already working on issue five as this issue debuts) and seeming earnest and unpretentious in their ambitions for this title. They're deserving of success; this is an astonishingly confident and capable first issue.
The Verdict: For a self-published comic by newcomers this is terrifyingly perfect; character, situation, and dialogue like this usually only come after years of honing your work to a high level. This title has hit the ground running, and running fast. Try and catch it. (AC)

thrill of scientific discovery and the true marvels of the natural world. This is, essentially, the central theme of The Sandwalk Adventures, and it's presented in a clear, concise and highly entertaining way that any child could understand, but which might do most adults a world of good also.
The Verdict: Another in that small, select group of children's comics which are accessible, entertaining and intellectually rewarding. Please check it out. (NQ)

Spider-Man's Tangled Web #11
Marvel
By Darwyn Cooke

Here is what I have learned from reading comics: It's neither big nor clever; every cloud has a silver lining; you have to take the rough with the smooth; and never rub another man's rhubarb. Listen... This issue is an extra-sized one-shot written and drawn by the capable Darwyn Cooke, artist on Catwoman and writer/artist of the superlative (and largely unread) Batman: Ego. His art is clear, gorgeous and has clarity of storytelling that beggars belief. His writing is sharp, incisive and encompasses the darkness of Batman: Ego and also this, a fun romp through a day in the life of Peter Parker (although he remains unconscious for most of it). Cooke can write and draw. He can also letter, as long as you don't mind the following: these new spellings of words not yet officially added to the English language - cappacino, withdrawl, suppossed and embarrassed; the contractions of "it is" missing their apostrophes seven times, and "let us" three times, comparing favourably to "what is" and "there is" with one example of absent punctuation apiece; last but not least, the word "work" missing completely from one sentence.

There is no letterer actually credited on this issue, but it does claim two editors in Axel Alonso and assistant John Miesegaes. What exactly is it that editors do again?
The Verdict: A lovely example of the Batman Adventures style applied to Spider-Man in an engaging and genuinely warm-hearted tale with beautifully simple art. But with a major publisher providing editing this shoddy, it's little wonder that comics are seen as being only worthy of illiterates. (AC)

Star Wars Tales #11
Dark Horse
By Various Creators

Spotlighting Han Solo, this issue – as ever – contains stories both good and bad, with the good as usual outweighing the bad (which is nicely metaphorical for a Star Wars comic).

Let's dispense with the bad first. Garth Ennis writes a tale of how Lando lost the Millennium Falcon to Han in a card game. Now, we all know this, and Ennis fails to add a single thing to the anecdote, aided in pointlessness by the art of Amanda Connor, who neglects to highlight the mysterious card player and draws an unrecognisable Lando Calrissian, neither of which helps with comprehension of the story. Jan Duursema's early tale of Han and a Jedi omits a story altogether, but does quote a lot of film dialogue concerning Han's lack of faith in the Force and ends with the Jedi wiping Han's memories of the incident so that he is free to quote the same words later in Star Wars.

Kia Asamiya contributes a clever tale of how Grand Moff Tarkin sends both Vader and Boba Fett to retrieve a deserting stormtrooper, who turns out to be Solo in his pre-smuggler days. Jason Hall and Chris Brunner's *The Princess Leia Diaries* shows how a young Leia's personality comes through on Alderaan as the legacy of her parentage, leading her into the rebellion rather than a life of royal ease. Scott Allie has various lowlifes in a bar telling and retelling Star Wars tales of their own, embellishing and lying in order to ingratiate themselves into the action.

While the good strips are enjoyable in themselves, they also set up resonances with the films in terms of character interaction and motivation, telling stories that are not only believable within the films we know, but also add to them in terms of incidental detail. The bad strips are merely unlikely and unremarkable.
The Verdict: As with any anthology title, the overall quality is variable. But this title hits more than it misses, and always has one exemplary tale; here, it is the sweet and heartfelt Princess Leia Diaries. (AC)

Tom Strong #16
ABC/DC/WildStorm
By Alan Moore, Chris Sprouse and Karl Story

This title tends to run hot and cold and is rarely unentertaining but this issue might be the best in the series. With its cinematic opening pages featuring the Weird Rider, and later the sci-fi/cowboy clash of the tale detailing how said cowboy came to be travelling through space, it just builds and builds towards an ominous cliffhanger, and compares well with the best contemporary cinematic and televisual offerings while still harking back to classic western and sci-fi pulp fiction. It isn't that the plot is particularly novel but Moore adds enough flourish and nuance to make the story compelling, while the recent addition of inker Karl Story seems to draw out the best from Sprouse, because here he provides some excellent storytelling sequences. The final page alone is so simply, elegantly executed; with the weight of the issue behind it, you *need* to read the next issue!
The Verdict: Simple, uncluttered storytelling allows the characters enough room to involve the readers in the best of ways. Put simply, this is old-fashioned stuff done right with a modern twist. (NL)

Trout #2
By Troy Nixey
Oni Press

Who is the odd child called Trout? Why does he live in a room by himself above the Lint Brothers' Turnip Works? What does he keep in a little jar on a shelf at the back of his room? No idea. But the strange creature called Erasermus has brought his frightful puppet show to town and stolen the souls of all the children, and now he's after Trout's soul, too. While Giuseppe Lint organises a desperate search for the missing children, Trout must try to withstand Erasermus' deadly power.

Troy Nixey's twisted Victorian fairy tale is a dark, gothic, atmospheric affair that doesn't need to make sense to be enjoyed. In fact, it revels in being a baffling box of tricks, gorgeous to look at but with a logic all its own. Comical in parts, with cartoony, caricatured characters and bizarre, nonsensical technology, Trout is nonetheless rife with foreboding and intimations of doom that may turn out to be entirely justified. Nice lettering, too, though for some reason the word balloons appear to be semi-transparent.
The Verdict: Nixey's art is great and the story is strange and enjoyable. (NQ)

The Waiting Place #12
Slave Labor Graphics
By Sean McKeever and Mike Norton

No sooner do I discover this title than it decides to end due to low sales. Fall to the ground and weep. Shake your fist at the heavens. Froth at the mouth. Gnash your teeth. If The Waiting Place can't succeed in the comics market, then it's not a good

sign. This is not to overstate the title's quality or to make excessive claims about its importance as a work of art or literature. In many ways it's quite an ordinary piece of work. It's about young people chafing at the restrictions of a small American town. It's warm, well observed, thoughtful, character driven late-teen/early twenties drama. It's extremely well done, both in terms of writing and art and, despite the setting, its themes of love and friendship and the trials and tribulations of growing up are universal. And this is the last issue.

It's quite a good ending, an extra-sized issue set on New Year's Eve following the characters from party to party. There's a sort of betrayal, a sort of reconciliation, a sort of epiphany. It ends when it ends, on a note both poignant and uncertain, open to further development, but a satisfying conclusion nonetheless. You missed it, and I think you would have liked it.
The Verdict: It's really, really good and you can still read it in the collected editions. (NQ)

VERDICT COLLECTED EDITION

The Birthday Riots
NBM/ComicsLit
By Nabiel Kanan

Political advisor Max Collins finds his cosy life torn apart by temptation and guilt as he tries to push a controversial land laws bill through parliament. The welcome return of Exit and Lost Girl creator Nabiel Kanan is a morality tale about abandoning your dreams for easy money, a comfortable existence and cheap sex. Approaching middle-age, Max Collins has turned his back on the ideals that defined him as a younger man, and the guilt is eating him up. Facing up to that may cost him everything, but it may also bring him a happiness and contentment he's long been denied.

Along the way we're treated to some fine writing including sharp, witty dialogue exchanges between Collins and his family and a couple of electrically charged moments of sexual tension – always a strength of this creator. Kanan's art has changed somewhat since Lost Girl, the hatching replaced by dot shading and heavier lines that set his current style mid-way between Sean Phillips and Charles Adlard – quite lovely.

On first reading, The Birthday Riots appears to end almost mid-sentence, after introducing a beguiling set of characters and scenarios that could have been taken much further. But it's an incredibly subtle – even insidious – denouement, which stays with you for a long time, working its way into your mind and refusing to let go.
The Verdict: Honesty, guilt and temptation – a profoundly affecting story, Nabiel Kanan's finest to date. (RH)

Colonia: Islands and Anomalies
Ait/PlanetLar
By Jeff Nicholson

Jack and his two uncles are prisoners aboard a square rigged pirate ship, which comes as a surprise to Jack and his two uncles because when they left Massachusetts on their fishing boat, it was the twentieth century. Everything seems to have changed around them, and now pirates ply the high seas, the Americas are still the New World and strangely depopulated, ducks can talk, mermaids sit on rocks combing their hair and singing their siren songs and ghost ships threaten their very souls. Plenty of adventures and high jinks ensue as the hapless Jack seeks to make sense of his eerily familiar but infinitely more dangerous world.

Despite a hesitant, slightly muddled start, Colonia quickly picks up pace and plot, laying on mysteries and wonders thick and fast. Written and drawn by Jeff Nicholson, perhaps best known for the disquieting Through The Habitrails, this new series is quite a departure, but he certainly seems to be enjoying himself, once he finds his feet. It's an "all ages" book, which seems to be an instant indication of quality these days. Colonia is very funny in parts, while the story itself is full of twists and reversals and strange excursions, which is as it should be.
The Verdict: Solid, highly readable entertainment for pirates young and old. Arrr. (NQ)

Hellboy: The Conqueror Worm
Dark Horse
By Mike Mignola

It's hard to review a Hellboy project and still come up with something new to say because time after time, Mignola taps the same dark veins and comes up with work of unvarying excellence. Collecting the four-issue series together with the online epilogue, this story sees Hellboy and Roger the homunculus fighting Lovecraftian Elder God-worshipping Nazis, while aided by the mysterious presence of an old pulp fiction-styled adventurer called Lobster Johnson. As usual, Mignola underscripts his dialogue that, when combined with the atmospheric black-drenched artwork, adds a mournful element of pathos to the nostalgic feel of the series. Mignola knows how to stave off boredom in his readers with his Hellboy stories by making them infrequent enough to create a demand, but by also changing Hellboy's activities by the end of this story he sets the course for the next few Hellboy projects.
The Verdict: Unwavering quality from Mignola sees the end of Hellboy's usual elements in favour of a new direction, but it sees the old direction out with a bang! (NL)

The Spectacular Spider-Man
Marvel
By Stan Lee & John Romita and Jim Mooney

In the rush to flood the market in time for the film, Marvel has reprinted one of its first ever graphic novels in its entirety... warts and all.

Originally published in magazine format back in the summer of 1968, the main story is 52 pages of prime Lee/Romita action involving corrupt political candidate Richard Raleigh's attempts to trick his way to power with a giant, lumbering Man-Monster as his primary aide. Perhaps Stan Lee chose the theme to help the mag appeal to an older audience, but the plot is perhaps even more relevant today. Less relevant is Stan's ever-groovy use of swinging slang, but it always gives his dialogue charm... and one wonders if Brian Bendis' hip yoof-speak will sound just as ridiculous in years to come. There's even an uncanny moment of near-prescience as Aunt May declares her support for Raleigh based on his actor-like good looks and Pete remarks, "Boy, judging by [her] reaction... I'm surprised Rock Hudson never ran for President!"

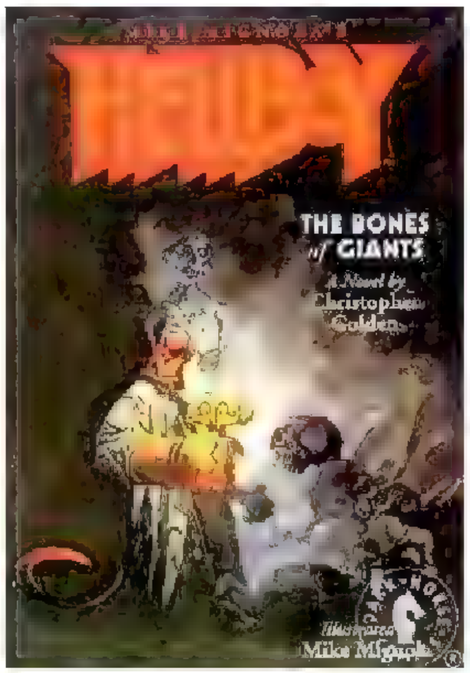
The art is vintage Romita, softened slightly by Jim Mooney's inking and muddied by the black and

white shading. The larger format does allow Jazzy Johnny to stretch out a bit, but this isn't always a good thing, with some panels looking a little empty in places.

Our main criticism of The Spectacular Spider-Man, though, must be that it's riddled with spelling mistakes and "typos" – perhaps Marvel's proofreader at the time was off getting ready for Woodstock, but what's his excuse thirty years later? Did no-one at Marvel 2002 even look at this book before rushing it back to the printers – or are we supposed to cherish the sloppy errors as historical artefacts? The majority of the story was originally reprinted in Amazing Spider-Man #116 - #118, and corrections were made to the dialogue then – why not now? In fact, said reworking of the story (pages of plot were added and changed, the strip was coloured for the first time) actually reads better than this original... maybe they should have reprinted that instead!
The Verdict: A cute completist's curio (cheers, Stan!) that may baffle younger readers today... unless they're sitting a proofreading exam soon. (RH)

Hellboy: The Bones Of Giants
Dark Horse
By Christopher Golden
with Mike Mignola

The second full-length Hellboy prose novel sees writer and novelist Christopher Golden returning to flesh out ideas by Hellboy creator Mike Mignola into a highly enjoyable adventure story. Called in to investigate the apparent discovery of the corpse of the Asgardian thunder god (his name is a secret revealed only at the end, like we couldn't guess it...), Hellboy picks up the mighty hammer Mjolnir and becomes fused with it, unable to remove it from his grasp while becoming possessed by the spirit of the thunderer himself. As the investigation continues, it seems the thunder god is here on unfinished business as his old enemy, Thrymm the Frost Giant, is also returning from the dead. What follows is a straightforward, uncluttered mix of intrigue, suspense and action as Golden hammers along to the inevitable showdown between God and Frost Giant but with enough surprises thrown in along the way to create a rising sense of tension. Mignola also provides grim spot illustrations throughout.
The Verdict: Not the most demanding of reads, but its straightforward plotting and lack of pretension propel the story along nicely, resulting in a simple but highly enjoyable novel. (NL)



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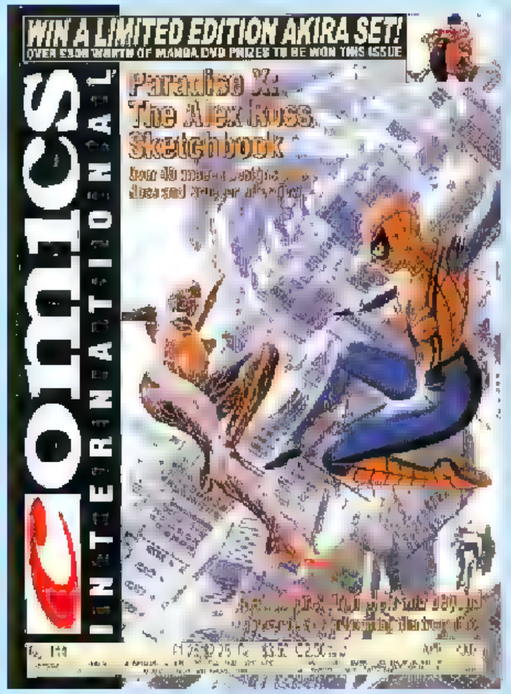


Comics International #144
Quality Communications Ltd

One of the most notable things about this specific issue is the Alex Ross sketchbook (in itself not actually a sketchbook because even the roughest of Ross pictures look as though he's spent a week each on them) which breaks from a 143 issue tradition - don't focus on one creator for fear of alienating the readers who are not interested.

The thing is, for all of the amazing things CI has given the industry over the last 12 years this is hardly its way forward. After years of saying "No interviews" and "No publisher pandering", CI is doing just that and focusing on someone who is rapidly becoming regarded as more of a hindrance than a help to the industry. Criticism of Alex Ross has been growing exponentially, either due to his increasingly lifeless "life" drawings, or because of his growing ego, which has led to some magazines refusing point blank to give the artist any coverage at all.

CI became a mildly collectable property with the Paradise X addendum and in many Ross aficionados' eyes this filled a void left by the artist's seeming reluctance to do anything other than character development and the odd Oscars poster. However, this "sketchbook" was a bit of a waste of paper and because we're used to so much being crammed into every page of Comics International, it looked out of place and smacked of filler material - which it patently wasn't. The quality of the paper and the poor printing quality of this magazine have meant it never lends itself well to reproduction of this nature – it just isn't a visual magazine regardless of our visual medium.

Putting the (now seemingly) over-rated Alex Ross eight pages to one side, removing the 16-page catalogue, the 30 pages of adverts, eight pages of directory and the other inconsequential parts of the magazine and you're paying over $2 for less than 40 pages of editorial - which on the face of it isn't actually that bad. But then take into account the way the news dates by the time it reaches the comic shops and the fact that even though the news team tries to give the reader something extra, it normally ends up being a shadow of what it could end up like. Then factor in the patronising editorials, David Bishop's complete waste of words and the pointless toy news section, and you're left with not a lot for your two and a quarter bucks.

Nearly 13 years after its launch it is still probably the best comics news magazine on sale, but it's been left behind on so many fronts. The Internet beats it to the punch on most stories, other magazines offer far more in-depth and attractive coverage and of course with CI we all have to put up with the obligatory Miracleman story every month. What this magazine needs is either an injection of youth and vitality or a serious rethink from the remaining writers and editors, because at the moment it's attempting to be everything to all men, when it really should concentrate on what it's good at, being a niche market magazine for a niche market – superheroes. Leave the rest of the comics industry to those that understand it, Dez, and concentrate on the spandex and playing ping pong with Marvel and DC.
The Verdict: This is never anything more than a perfunctory product, catering ostensibly to the UK market with pretensions of being internationally recognised. The US and UK isn't really "international" in comics and for CI to live up to its title it needs a more cosmopolitan focus, and that would ultimately frighten off the remainder of its readers. Like US comics right now, this is never going to be more than it is at this moment and what it is at the moment is a pale shadow of what it was. Something you need only buy two or three times a year and then only after making sure you can't get the content in more depth anywhere else. (NMc)

DAYS OF MIRACLE AND WONDER

Danger Unlimited and the last stand of John Byrne - an overview by Ian Salmon

HAS there ever been a swifter, more decisive fall from grace than that of John Byrne? Apart from the arch angel Lucifer, that is. Oh, and Frank Miller over the next six months. But then, Byrne never attempted the overthrow of heaven. And for all the sins of Spider-Man Chapter One or "Year One" or "Quick, let's re-invent him and hope they all forget the goddamn Clone Saga" or whatever it was actually called, he was not - and let's repeat and reinforce that - he was *not* responsible for DK2.

But still he fell from our affections, suddenly and completely, like the bitter end of a brightly burning love affair. It was as though he had broken our hearts, leaving us shattered. We denied all the love that we had once held for him, left him reviled and despised, an increasingly marginalised figure.

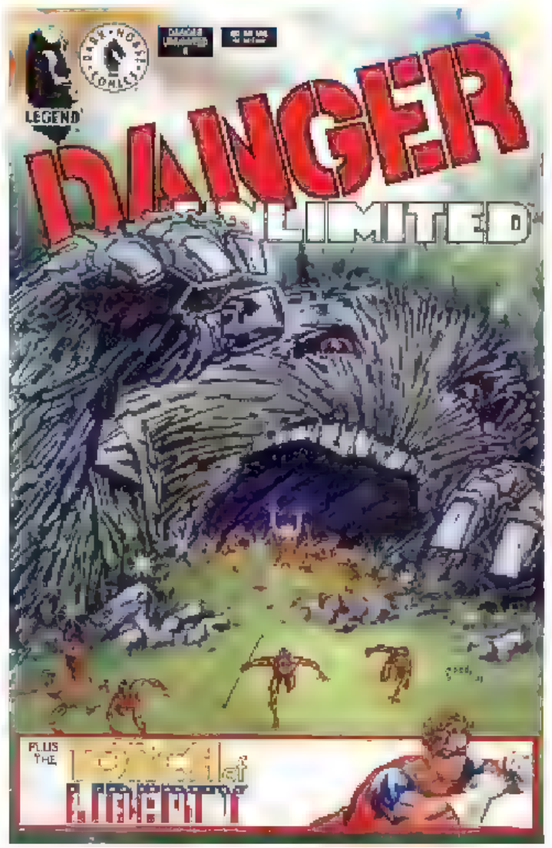
And it wasn't for the folly of a rampant ego. At the point that he reported a friend's reaction to Jack Kirby's death as "Well John, you're the king now" with no trace of modesty, we would still have embraced him and probably forgiven him if we had still believed in him. We didn't and the truth is, it wasn't his fault, it was ours. We broke *his* heart.

But first a recap, from memory and fanboy emotion. Byrne came to Marvel from the relative ghetto of Charlton, creating works that would later become sought after fan favourites in Doomsday Plus One and ROG 2000. Now bear in mind that this was Marvel in the mid 70s - we still had to endure George Tuska, Don Heck and Herb Trimpe, probably lovely guys each and every one but that doesn't mean that you should have to look at their work. The workmanlike Dave Cockrum was at the helm of the X-Men and we thought he was wonderful. Byrne sidled in through The Champions, notably with Chris Claremont, and suddenly exploded everywhere - Marvel Team-Up, Iron Fist, The X-Men.

Let's not kid ourselves. This was as good as Marvel got. The Byrne and Claremont partnership on the fledgling X-franchise was a thing of pure wonderment, plotted apparently by Byrne as much as Claremont, without the artist ever getting as much of the credit as he deserved or apparently desired. When you contemplate the size of the X-Men now you have to accept that much of it is due to the input of John Byrne. Why did Wolverine become so loved by fans? Because Byrne loved drawing him and did it bloody well.

Of course it didn't last; the partnership fell victim, apparently, to the twin evils of personal conflict and lack of recognition, and then Byrne was flying solo. And doing it well. Alpha Flight, West Coast Avengers, Fantastic Four - probably the last truly great run on the "World's Greatest Comic Magazine" - which he left mid-story to take on the supreme task of re-inventing Superman for the modern era. Again he shone, but it seemed to be his last gasp. The future held little glory - a return to Marvel, a second chance on She-Hulk, a second chance on The Hulk himself, the woeful re-telling of Spidey's first year and ultimately the much ignored secret tales of Marvel's lost 1950s and the unwanted gap between the cancellation of The X-Men and their rebirth, the latter leading to his final falling out with Marvel and his current absence from view.

But there's something in the middle and that something is the key to his fall. That something happened in 1994, appeared in Dark Horse's "Legend" imprint - the vanity label for Byrne and Frank Miller - lasted four issues and vanished. That something was called Danger Unlimited.



Danger Unlimited was, as Byrne stated in the letter column (remember them?) of the last issue "...a test to see if the marketplace would or could support an old-fashioned superhero book". It could just as easily be viewed as Byrne's chance to finish off his run on Fantastic Four; although in his first lettercol he stated that "...DU could never be a clone of FF..." anybody with half a versing in comic lore could see that he was quite clearly "riffing" on his former book. DU is structured in such a manner that it covers three time periods (four if you include the back up strip *Torch Of Liberty*, which feeds nicely into the main story) and creates a pantheon, a worldview as distinctive and as salutary to the archetypes that preceded it as anything by Alan Moore or Kurt Busiek. Byrne has created his universe and is going to have fun in it.

We start in the future with the discovery of the titular team's headquarters sealed off in an apocalyptic battle that may or may not have something to do with the fact that the world is now controlled, *Matrix* style, by a conquering alien race, and reshaped to their needs. The rescue of the only surviving member of the team serves to tell the tale of the last battle, whilst also slipping in the origin of the original Danger Unlimited. The surviving member is a creature of extreme heat and cold called Thermal (obviously not the Human Torch) His sister who can create images is not the Invisible Girl, their incredibly intelligent explorer father, Doc Danger, is not Mr. Fantastic and the rock like creature known as Hunk is not The Thing.

Which sounds cynical. It's not, it's delightful. Byrne is having a hell of a time and it's a hell of a read, joyful, uncomplicated and filled with wonder at the very notion of superheroes set in simpler times whilst also creating a new team for a new threat. The rescuers of the aforementioned Thermal, exposed to the "Gunk" that gave the original team their powers, develop in new/ old ways - a female version of Hunk, a scientist that splits into triplicate - leaving us with the promise of a fine tale to unfold.

Which is all we had. A promise. Danger Unlimited didn't sell, or at least not in the quantities that it required to stay afloat. Seemingly disheartened, Byrne moved toward the sure bets - re-tellings and re-toolings of ideas that had gone before, his scripting and art growing more lacklustre with each one. DU was the last stand of the old John Byrne - his scripts still sharp, his art yet to develop into the alternating "too scratchy" or "too heavily self-inked" that we would later complain of, a John Byrne who stated that he was waiting for "...a marketplace tolerant of...good, solid art and stories without bells and whistles...".

It may well be here now, but it may well be too late. John Byrne's heart may no longer be in it. He gave us something that he loved and too many of us ignored it. He gave us the origin story of an idea that could have run and run; we didn't allow it to gain its legs. We broke his heart; and everything that follows is our own fault. **BL**

BEAUTIFUL LOSERS

If they were CDs, they'd be the last two XTC albums; if they were films, they'd be Shiner *or perhaps something by David Mamet. Lionised by the critics, loved by a small hardcore of fans, completely ignored by everybody else. In the first of an occasional series, we begin to look at comics series which should've done far better than they did and which vanished far too quickly. These, then, are the Beautiful Losers.*

Steve Miller pulls up the collar on his trenchcoat and asks to see The Director...

CHASE sprang from the blocks early in 1998 as "the comic most likely to". DC gave a hefty promotional push at the start of this series by young guns D. Curtis Johnson and J.H. Williams III, introducing the main character in an issue of Batman that led indirectly into Chase, the series proper. Chase had a premise that, on the face of it, was a no-brainer, and yet by the end of the year the title had been cast aside, critical acclaim proving, yet again, to be no defence against commercial indifference.

The title featured the debut of a shadowy new organisation in the DC Universe called the Department of Extranormal Operations (DEO). This government body was headed by a secretive director, and was charged with monitoring metahuman activity, with specific regard to government regulation of such activity. Naturally, it wouldn't be a shadowy government agency if it didn't have hidden agendas and covert operations, and the DEO did (and still does) maintain comprehensive files on all the DC superheroes with a view to exerting government control over them.

On a more personal level, the comic is about a woman called Cameron Chase, from whom the series gets its name. Chase is an independent and resourceful woman who has been headhunted by the DEO, and the first few issues of the comic show her adapting to her new role.

If you are a hardcore DC enthusiast then Chase was probably a wet dream of a comic. As the DEO is in charge of regulating metahuman activity, it goes without saying that there are guest appearances all over the shop. The Suicide Squad made an early appearance along with lesser-known characters such as the Rocket Reds and The Construct. When Booster Gold and Firehawk popped up in issue four, you started to get the impression that the creators had a rather large collection of 1980s back issues, a view reinforced when the director of the DEO turned out to be Mr. Bones, a relic from Infinity Inc..

Such a nuts and bolts analysis could serve to obscure what was achieved here. Johnson and Williams (credited as co-plotters from the second issue on) used

these 80s leftovers with care and intelligence, and they also managed to develop Cameron Chase into a likeable character with a strong history and a legitimate personal reason to hate superheroes.

The book was no slouch in the art department either. Williams, in tandem with inker Mick Gray, channelled the spirits of early Chris Bachalo and Tony Harris, mixing them with layouts that dared to soar where similar attempts by a young Todd McFarlane had stuck on the runway. Somehow this all came together into a book that looked concurrently of its time, and yet like an historical artefact. The artists made Chase one of the most visually arresting books in the mainstream, and were developing that look with each issue.

So why, you may ask, was the book cancelled? The simple answer is that it wasn't selling. The first issue, with all the attendant launch hoopla, had pre-orders of 35,000 issues. This was falling with each issue and by issue six the figure was below 16,000 copies, with no sign of it turning around. With those figures, it would have been more of a surprise had DC let the book continue rather than chop it.

The more pertinent question, therefore, is to ask why the series had such meagre sales figures. Central to this problem was that the book proved very hard for DC to categorise. In tone and execution it resembled a Vertigo title, but the characters were firmly from the mainstream DC Universe. Before the establishment of the Vertigo line both types of books could happily co-exist, but in 1998 Chase fell between two stools. As a result, to provide a hook for the new title DC promoted it as being similar to *The X-Files*. However, as this latched onto this TV series long after it had lost its lustre and started to painfully retread old ground, the comparison didn't really benefit the comic.

Also, while it may have made sense from a storytelling perspective, in hindsight the decision to not feature any of DC's big names in the actual series until issue seven stands out as commercial suicide. If the comic had been launched with a two part Superman or Batman story, who's to say we wouldn't still be reading Chase today?

Chase concluded with a flashback tale featuring Green Lantern and a tie-in to the DC One Million event that, whilst imaginative and satisfying, is in no way essential. The first eight issues do stand together as a seamless collection of quality writing and art, and, were DC so minded, would make a great addition to their trade paperback list.

In comics, cancellation is rarely the end of the story. Dan Johnson is still writing, his scripts for DC popping up in the strangest places. Williams and Gray jumped straight from Chase to Promethea where their spectacular ever-evolving art has been picking up industry awards aplenty. And Cameron Chase? Although the DEO hasn't played the major role in the DC Universe that its creators obviously envisaged, Chase is still making irregular appearances in DC's Secret Files titles, in stories written by Johnson and Williams. Whilst these appearances may not be the full fledged revival that fans of the book wish for, they do serve to ensure that there is a corner of the DC Universe where the DEO is still active. Which, after all, turned out to be a good thing.

Chase, DC Comics, 10 issues 1998 (1-9, 1,000,000) by D.C. Johnson, J.H. Williams III & Mick Gray. **BL**

YOUNG GUNS

It's not age but talent that determines tomorrow's stars today... this issue: PJ Holden

MY name is Paul. I'm an alco... Oh, hang on. Wrong article.

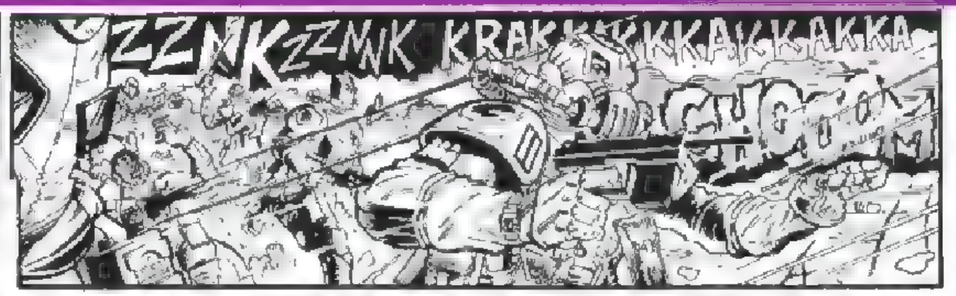
Hi. I'm a sometime comics artist, Paul JHolden. So far I've spent one year in the wacky world of professional comic book illustration, and you know what? Getting in is the easy bit, it's the staying that's hard.

Let's start with a little history. I'm 32, I've been drawing comics off and on for, what, 10 years? And I live and work in Belfast, Northern Ireland (which is, contrary to popular belief, a lovely place). My very first professional comics work was done for Fantagraphics and Eros, doing the artwork for a comic called Holy Cross, a follow-up graphic novel called The Moon Looked Down and Laughed and a very funny camp daredevil called The Dandy Lion, all written by Malachy Coney. After that I did lots and lots of the usual small press shenanigans, including strips for Violent!, Class of 79 and Zarjaz. Between times I also slipped in a 10 page short story for Caliber's Negative Burn, called *Suicide Kings*, written by Mike "Lucifer" Carey.

After several years of small press obscurity I landed my first pro gig from 2000AD, which pretty much marked my entrance into pro press obscurity. My first work for 2000AD was a *Judge Dredd* strip called *Sino-Town*, written by Gordon "Laughing Boy" Rennie. Mind you, it doesn't take too much time for that first frisson of excitement to wear off and it wasn't long before I was tarting

myself around trying to pick up whatever other work I could. Over the remainder of last year I landed a number of short stories with Warhammer Monthly and bagged a couple of *Future Shock*s and a second Dredd.

Now I've spent a year paddling in the big pool I'm hoping the next year will allow me the chance to wade in and do more than just the odd one-offs and filler issues. Although, having said that, I don't mind if I spend next year doing nothing but small press strips, the money is lousy but at least the editors leave you alone.

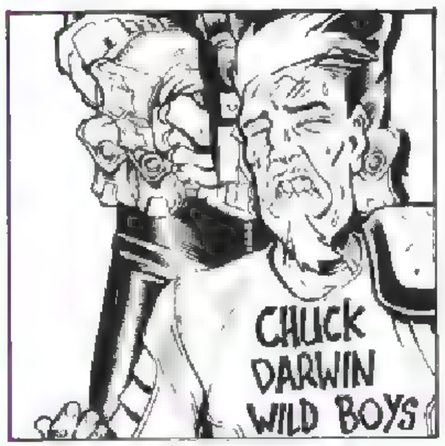


Artwork

Rogue Trooper *(above, middle)*: Saving Private Bryan by Si Spurrier for Zarjaz. I really like this page, which, if you know me at all, you'll know is unusual. But Rogue was always my fave character from 2000AD. Of course having revisited old Rogues I've since realised that, well, it wasn't great literature - but it was fantastic artwork.

Durham Red *(above, right)*: A sketch done online while the patented "PJTV" webcamera was in operation.

Bulldog *(previous page, right)*: Written by Jason Cobley. I love Bulldog, I'm not sure why. I've always loved things that are peculiarly British, like *The Avengers*, *The Prisoner* and Alan Moore's Captain Britain.



Red Devil *(previous page, left)*: A sample character sketch for a self published small press series I've been mulling over called "Hell Police" or "Blue Blazes". I'm not sure yet.

The Happy Prince *(above, left)*: Page 1 of an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's The Happy Prince, adapted by Malachy Coney. I like the quirkiness of this art style and would still like to return to it to finish it.

Judge Dredd: Unnatural Selection *(left)*. I got to draw an Alan Grant Dredd! How cool is that!

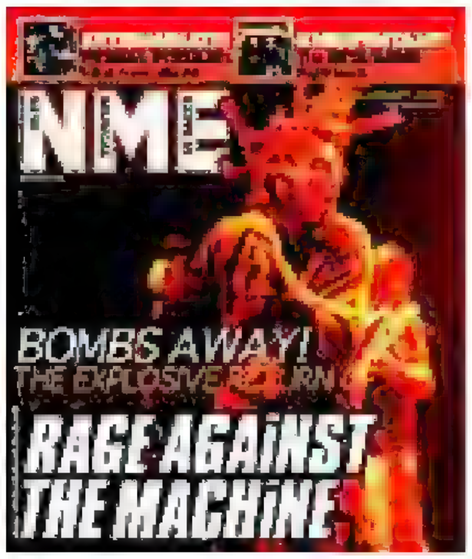
Artists! Want to be featured in ***Drawing Board*** *or* ***Young Guns****? Contact Phil Hall at phil.hall@borderline.mediahall.co.uk or editorial@borderline.mediahall.co.uk*
We're constantly looking for established artists and newcomers to give them exposure they might otherwise fail to get from other comics magazines!

BL

WILL THE LAST US COMICS PUBLISHER OUT PLEASE SWITCH OFF THE LIGHTS

To paraphrase a UK TV programme's most famous line, "This is a local hobby, for local people. We'll have no trouble here..." Except it isn't a joke – the US comic industry is in terminal decline, regardless of what Joey Q and Bill Jemas tell us. Phil Hall asks why in this second part of his Industry Standard *special...*

PEOPLE (me included) can continually go on about how much more successful everyone else's comics industry is than the USA's or Britain's, but the truth is that publishing, as we know it, is undergoing massive transformations. In Spin Doctor parlance the entire publishing industry is in the throes of consolidating.



In the UK, one of the stalwarts of the newsstands and world-renowned music newspaper the *NME* (*New Musical Express*) is apparently in a terminal slide and is due to join *Melody Maker* in music publishing heaven. However, UK-based heavy metal magazine *Kerrang* has seen its readership increase over the years. A lesson learnt from this is that "generic" doesn't work anymore. The *NME* has always prided itself on the fact that it covers all kinds of popular music (maybe spending too long on some and not long enough on others, but that's just a personal bias). Its editors have all felt they are at the cutting edge of the UK music industry (the music

that makes the rest of world go round!), but the truth is they should have taken a leaf out of the US superhero comics industry and just continued catering to their existing readership rather than mutating with every change in the UK music scene.

What?

My accountant had every single edition of the *NME* in his attic from 1974 through to 1994 - 20 years of music history, a fabulous chronicle. But by 1995, he was only picking it up whenever he saw something about a band he liked. By 1996, he wasn't buying it at all. In 2001 he was buying *Classic Rock Magazine* on a regular basis. He *is* the niche market that the publishers of *NME* failed to identify.

I've personally banged on for

years about how I see the comics industry as being very similar to the music industry, but on a much smaller, parochial scale. So the impending death of the UK music's equivalent to comics' *Wizard* is quite prophetic. The *NME* is failing essentially because of two things - lack of readership and advertising. *Wizard* hasn't got that problem just yet, but it has lost a large percentage of its readership since its launch over 10 years ago. If the major publishers pulled their advertising budgets, *Wizard* couldn't survive more than a few months without terminally haemorrhaging.

Applying the above to the real world for a second: advertising. There's a noticeable lack of it at present (not a lot anyone can do about this). With the threat of a world recession, one of the first things to go is your advertising budget. Advertising on television in both the US and UK has dropped by over 14% in the last three years - that's a lot of turnover. The general public are fed up to the back teeth with advertising. Pick up any magazine and you are faced with at least 50% of the content being advertisements - and analysts believe that we, the consumer, will only pay attention to approximately 10% of those adverts. Market analysts believe that advertising revenue will continue to drop over the next five years; couple this with dwindling readers and the only way for many magazines to tread water is to raise the cover price exponentially. In the USA and UK cover prices for magazines are already highly inflated compared to the rest of the world. This has more to do with the short-term greed of the publisher rather than necessity (or the cost of paper and printing!).

In relation to comics: it is fairly obvious that Marvel and DC could survive without the little bit of outside advertising they have in their titles - although those inside and back covers probably stop the companies from adding an extra 50 cents onto the already heavily inflated cover prices - and there really is a belief in the industry that increasing advertising pages *will* drive away the readers who are hanging onto their hobbies by a thread. Advertising revenue isn't really an issue in comics publishing today. However…

Readership *(eg - above)*. How does one address a problem that is as old as publishing itself - keeping the people happy enough to come back for more? This is, for the comics industry, the more important and complex part of the equation, because there are many factors at work here compared to the simplistic necessities of advertising revenues.

What I'm ostensibly talking about is publishing in general. Try and apply basic publishing practices to (mainly) the (US) comics industry and you're into a

different ball game altogether. The same problems apply, but the rules get changed. Comics publishing is a bit like Extreme Sports without the danger… US comics publishers, to use the English vernacular, take the piss out of their readers, their retailers and ultimately their creators - they let someone else get subjected to the dangers (this time the economic ones) while they just sit back and get the benefits.

And despite all the change in language it's still being run by the same old dinosaurs and farts it was 40 years ago. It's amazing that such a perfectly ephemeral industry is still alive and capable of having people like me wonder how.

I won't try to explain the intricacies of the real publishing industry, except to say that in the course of producing **Borderline**, I have had more support from the book trade than I have from the comics industry! Last issue we had free copies of hardback books to give away, sent to us without question by publishers, yet the two biggest publishers of US comics can't justify (or afford?) sending us preview or review copies of their comics - because it costs too much (and they probably can't see the benefits). On the flip side, in nine months I have received more independent comics and trades than I believed possible, from small publishers who are applying real publishing practices to their smaller scale endeavours. Is it any wonder that we, as a magazine, give more coverage to the people who actually view promotion as *the* most important tool in selling their wares? But to you, the consumer, this just sounds like the trade press being hacked off.

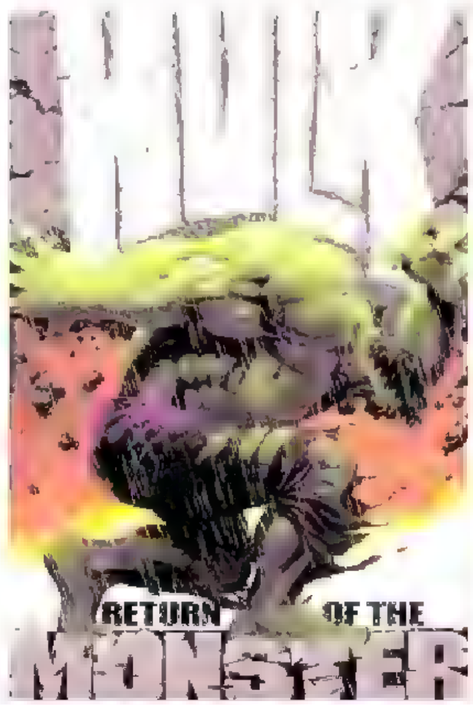
However, this isn't the only area where major US comics publishers indirectly fail you, the consumer. My brother-in-law worked for a large, well-known chain of record stores. The amount of support both the large and independent retailers get from the music industry is *incredible*. From Point Of Sale promotional material to freebies and specials, the music industry bends over backwards to try and get even the smallest of record stores to sell its products… Marvel and DC have something of a monopoly on the stock most comic shops sell, therefore it's up to the retailer to *buy* his *own* Point Of Sale or promotional materials! Apart from being unheard of anywhere else in the entertainment industry world, who do you think ultimately pays the price for this? You do! Because the comics publishers want and need to maintain a certain profit level, they will continue to kill the industry just to stay alive for that bit longer.

Now, I've heard all the arguments about why the comics industry has to be like this – it all equates to the amount of profit made. If you take just one major record label's turnover in a single year, it is probably more than that of the entire US comics industry; it would be safe to say that U2 is more important to the US and UK economies than their respective comics industries.

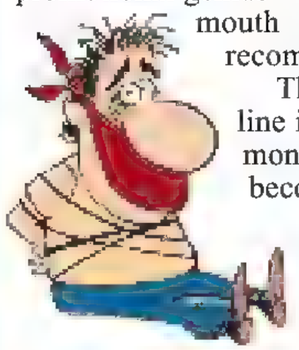
But it doesn't stop there. Major comics publishers will milk as much from their dedicated fans as they possibly can and have still failed to learn from previous heinous mistakes. The problem with the US comics industry is that it's always been a poor relation to other countries' industries. Despite the UK and US being among the countries responsible for comics in the first place, neither treats this medium with the same amount of respect as any other single country in the world. The problems probably start at grass roots level; comics-producing countries like Belgium, Brazil, South Korea and South Africa have some government funding or support for comics, whereas neither Britain nor the States has ever had much more than derision for comics since Wertham effectively destroyed the progress of the industry in the 1950s.

The US comics industry has literally grown and thrived on the dedication of its fans and their ability to allow themselves to be the cheap form of advertising needed to keep the ball rolling. The problem now is that in a world where profit is the key to everything, this industry has either become completely selective about who it believes should gain from the fringe benefits or it hangs onto a philosophy that applied in the Sixties and Seventies, died in the Eighties and has been reborn through the internet in the Nineties and new century – "fandom".

Of course there's the less obvious reasons why it isn't working. Before the Internet, there was the fanzine. Before publishers had marketing and PR departments there was … the fanzine. The fan has always been the driving force behind comics. The fan always used to be the last person to be adversely affected by the dwindling industry. Sure, he faced increases on the cover price of his favourite comic, but he was a loyal and dedicated type who'd walk barefoot for 30 miles over



broken glass just for a copy of the latest **Batman** or **Hulk**. The fan, by and large, was the untouchable element in this strange symbiosis. But that changed as well; as less and less money was being made from the product being produced, corporate suits started to be unimpressed by the fanaticism of the fan and his dedication. Copyright became an issue. Then it was no longer prudent for the comics companies to talk to their fans and the growing number of amateur journalists sprouting up. The fans themselves were being used as the reason for the sudden decline in information about their future stories and comics. DC and Marvel effectively put a gag on the fandom element - and it doesn't matter how much they try to fix it now, the trust has gone from many stalwart fans. Oh, they won't desert the sinking ship, but they won't bother to be as free and easy with their own kind of promotional genius - the word of mouth recommendation.



The bottom line is that once money started to become the *only* element of the industry worth concentrating on, the rest of the industry became moot.

So, the initial problem is that the comics industry has to attract new readers or keep the existing ones. This is achieved through promotional exercises. Remember, this is an industry that doesn't really actively encourage advertising in its pages and absolutely refuses to advertise itself in the real world, preferring to preach to the converted rather than try to convert a few more. This is probably due to low self-esteem, lack of money (again… it makes you wonder how this industry keeps so many people in work if it doesn't actually make any money for future investment) and previous failed attempts by altruists with no guidance from real world agencies. The main US comics industry doesn't follow any of the precedents set out by the music, book or video/DVD publishing industries - it doesn't advertise, it doesn't promote, it doesn't network, it doesn't schmooze, it doesn't actually do a lot except rely on others to spout its hyperbole for it. It probably takes itself a bit too seriously and that was probably the fault of the economic boom in the late 1980s. Had that not happened, the comics industry would probably have been dead by now, or struggling to keep its head above water. The sad truth is that the US comics industry is so far down the toilet that it's probably impossible to fix. Whatever great work Quesada and Jemas are doing at Marvel, or whatever the effect of Paul Levitz replacing Jenette Kahn at DC, the majority of this industry is relying on the law of diminishing returns. None of these guys are going to fix that.

The sad thing is that the Koi Carp industry is much bigger than the comics industry. It has a bigger turnover in the US and UK than comics. It has two successful UK newsstand magazines, each with over 250,000 readers, alone. This is, at the moment, a growing hobby and is attracting new owners and breeders every week.

US comics are not attracting new people at all – they are bringing back an aging audience that gave up on comics five, ten, fifteen years ago and are being tempted back by things they want to see. Harping on about a new Frank Miller Dark Knight series isn't aimed at all the kids and non-comics readers out there – it's aimed at all the lapsed fans who stopped reading comics between the final issue of **Dark Knight Returns** and now. Read between the lines of all the hyperbole coming from Marvel, specifically, and you'll see that they are admitting defeat. They now appreciate that they are living on borrowed time. They know that the majority of their fans will die and never be replaced. There is an element of hope in there; the recruitment of some of the independent scene's rising stars holds a glimmer of the future because if these people can sell 3 or 4,000 copies of their slice of life comic on a regular basis and to collectors or readers that don't read the adventures of Spandex-Man, then they might be able to attract them over and bring some, if not all, of their dedicated fans with them. But we're talking about *very* small contributions to a bigger picture and it has to be acknowledged that Quesada and Jemas recognising these people isn't really foresight, it's utilising existing materials while there's still money to be made out of it.

The only way to improve the industry is to change the perception the rest of the world has of it and that isn't going to happen. There's nearly 50 years of prejudice built up and the irony is I shouldn't be telling *you* this, I should be telling the rest of the world… but it isn't listening.

If the publishing industry is struggling, then the comics publishing industry is onto a further hiding to nothing. It might be able to buck trends for a while - after all it did in 1990 when the rest of the world was reeling from a recession, but the sad truth about 1990 is that there wasn't a huge influx of new comics readers, there was just a huge influx of money from speculators and those who had made their money in other areas and fancied a flutter. In other words it wasn't about the quality, it was about the quantity and today there is a damned sight more quality than there was in 1990 but there's nothing like the quantity. Comics need to stop thinking about the grand scheme of things and concentrate on rebuilding areas of the industry that still have a future. The industry needs to be prepared to speculate to accumulate. It needs to say that things were done wrongly, now they have to be done differently. The problem is I see no innovators at any of these major companies and without the people with the right ideas, we really are going to be seeing an industry no bigger than a Third World country's small press movement.

Next issue: Why money is the root of all evil; how to use comics to solve world peace, hunger and health issues; and hemp comics, the cheap alternative! BL

the COMIC STRIPPER

DRAWING BOARD—

ANTHONY WILLIAMS

WELCOME to my world. Fifteen years of drawing comics. Fifteen years of leading a bizarre double life.

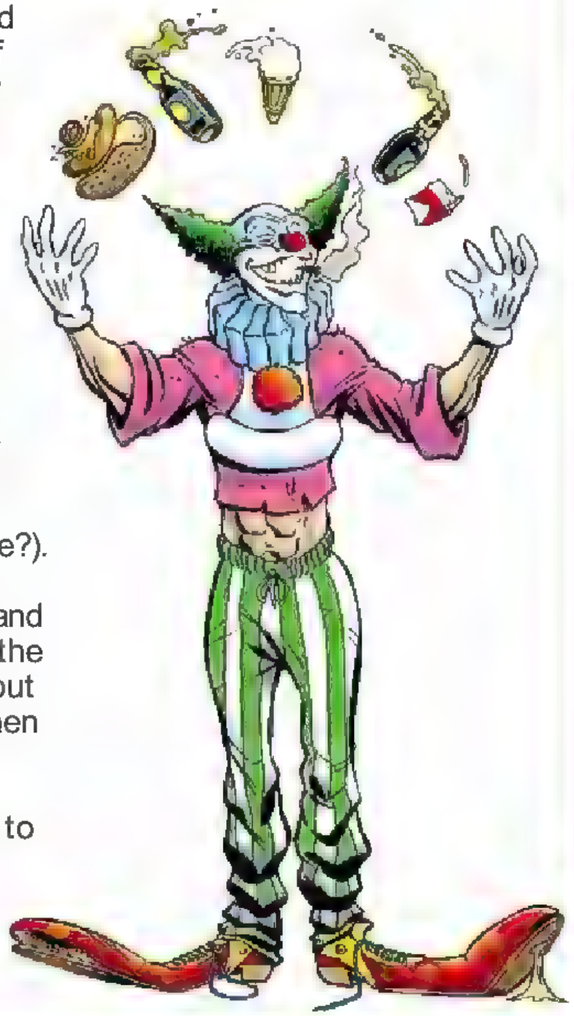
On the one hand, I'm The Comic Stripper (coming soon, Comic-stripper.com), purveyor of strips, illustration, storyboards et al to the media world. When I'm Mr. Stripper, I'm the confident illustration machine my clients have grown to love.

The other me has been around a lot longer. When I get a comic book job, the palms sweat, the pencil shakes and the desperate to succeed comic book artist reappears. I lose faith in my ability to draw and look longingly at the work of other artists. And I just know these other artists sit at their drawing boards, frozen margarita in hand, enjoying every moment as they craft exquisite page after exquisite page (you know who you are, you bastards), whilst I sit at my board asking myself over and over how I've managed to fool so many editors over so many years into giving me work (who's that agreeing with me?).

Frankly, this is dumb. I've carved out a decent career and developed as an artist. Not the greatest artist in the world but better than I dreamed of when I started.

So I've told my inner desperate comic book artist to piss off. No more trying to please editors by aping the style of the artist of a book for which I'm doing a fill-in. No more punishing myself over every panel on every page. No more tormenting myself over whether the writer will notice that I've drawn a Magnum instead of a Colt. Or that the bullet trajectory is all wrong for that type of weapon. I actually got slaughtered once by a nameless gun lovin' (and probably totin') writer for committing this cardinal sin. You would not believe the torment, sleepless nights and self-loathing that followed.

From this day forward I'm Mr. Super Confident. In years



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to come you will see me drag my bloated ego around the bars of the convention circuit. I too shall pontificate about the state of the industry and bitch mercilessly about friends (hah!), colleagues and erstwhile employers.

Anyway, that's all to come.

What you see here is a good cross-section of what I'm doing now. Five years ago, I bought my first Mac and the artistic possibilities took off. I've since discovered that there is a far more lucrative world outside of comics. I've been having a good time illustrating for advertising,

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magazines, books, storyboarding and the web. If I had any sense I'd concentrate on this. But that damn seductive siren call keeps pulling me back. I'm putting my newfound and still evolving computer skills to good use, rendering *Titan* for Games Workshop. I've done the occasional job for 2000AD. I also get to draw Scooby Doo on a semi-regular basis, which finally got my kids noticing what I do. You can see my latest published superhero stuff in Superboy #99 and if a regular book comes along again I'll jump at it. And if any editors are reading this, I'll give you 12 issues a year.

In the meantime, I'll keep on producing sample pieces such as the ones you see here - all of which is my own work, except for the Iron Man - Ultron spread which was inked by Andy Lanning and coloured by Alan Craddock. Both of whom did a better job than I ever could. And they know it, the smug gits.

BL

NB: Several years ago Borderline editor Phil Hall suggested in the pages of another comics magazine that Anthony received the majority of his work at Marvel and DC through nepotism, rather than hard work and aptitude. This was never the case and this is the first time a public apology has been possible.

Publishers: if you like any of this or other artists' work that has been featured in Borderline over the last 9 months, contact us and we'll pass on the relevant artists' details.

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WORLD OF HEROS

Chris Spicer & the World of Heros investigative team continue to scour their imaginations for all kinds of bollocks...

Archie publishes pornographic Betty and Veronica comic for Swedish cattle market

DC And Marvel Sail In The Oneupman Ship

HAVING seen DC score a major sales success with its **10 Cents Comic**, Marvel has decided to go one better by planning a similar title.

"Although we've always said that if DC came up with a good idea then we'd copy it, I think it's fair to say that our comic will be completely different to DC's in every respect", said that liar Bill Jemas recently.

Marvel's title, the **9 Cents Comic**, will be published soon. However, DC has already announced a follow-up to its original title.

"Some people say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," DC's Paul Levitz (or Ol' Buckethead as he claims staff call him now) told us. "I say - bollocks." The new DC title, the **8 Cents Comic**, will be published around summertime.

Marvel, however, refuses to be beaten. It has already announced a sequel to its title. The **7 Cents Comic** will be published in the autumn; as Bill Jemas told us: "Those DC bastards aren't going to win that easily!"

DC's response has been speedy. The **6 Cents Comic** will be published this winter. Paul Levitz told us "We are rubber, Marvel are glue."

Marvel's reaction has been to put into action its plan to publish the **5 Cents Comic**, and to stick their tongues out. DC has responded by unveiling the advertising campaign for the **4 Cents Comic**, and by letting off smoke bombs in Marvel's main offices. Marvel struck back by revealing the **3 Cents Comic**, claiming the whole idea was theirs in the first place, and removing the step ladder from underneath Paul Levitz while he was in his loft, leaving him dangling by his fingertips like a marmoset up a tree. DC's announcement of the **2 Cents Comic** took no-one by surprise, although the paint bomb they left in Bill Jemas' mailbox certainly gave him a bit of a shock. Marvel has since announced the **1 Cent Comic**, and purposely overfed the goldfish in the DC offices. DC has responded by announcing the **Buy One Get One Free Comic**, and by unleashing seventy-three marmosets into the Marvel headquarters. Marvel has since released details of the **One Free With Every Bottle Of Milk Comic**, but we got sick of the whole thing long before then.

A representative of Dark Horse told us: "We've been watching this whole thing with amazement. We've been thinking about trying this for years - although quite frankly, we don't think that anyone would read our comics even if we *did* give them away."

DC Comics to merge with US jockstrap manufacturing company – TimeWarner believes the comics giant needs more support.

DC unveils new cover gimmick – No BS!

After the recent invention of the reverse gatefold cover, DC has decided to go one better with its announcement of the Quadruple Horizontal Reverse Gatefold Cover. Via a complicated series of creases, bends and cuts, this allows DC's covers to fold out into a double-sided poster large enough to cover a small billboard or a baby elephant.

DC's Head of Wacky Press Releases, Hilarious Announcements And Generally Being One Ker-Razy Guy, Paul Levitz, told us "You're gonna need a black belt in origami to open these covers!" In a related story, the *World Of Heros* team were later given medical treatment for bruised knuckles.

The only problem with these new covers is the huge production costs involved. Each cover produced costs several thousand dollars to prepare and print. These costs are raised even higher by the price of training workers to fold them (rumours that Chris Claremont has been supplying monkeys at cost price have yet to be substantiated). However, Levitz assured us that "the increased costs will be absorbed into DC's line of comics, and we're sure that readers won't mind a slight rise in cover price if it means that they can own something so incredible!"

The first comic to feature the gimmick will be the $495.00 JLA#60.

The real question, though, is this: what is the real point of these covers? When we put this to Levitz, he said, shaking with excitement, "Just think - now you can own really big J. Scott Campbell pictures!" Allegations made that the *World Of Heros* team were later seen letting down the tyres on his car have yet to be proven (we weren't there, no-one seen us do it, Guv.)

Marvel later made a statement that it was going to do the exact same thing, but that theirs would be better. Because they're a great big bunch of girly copycats.

"Erik Larsen ate my hamster" – True Fact!

This news just in... After his third home in as many years was destroyed by the freak weather conditions that follow him around the United States, Erik Larsen was found bruised and battered in the attic of a house in Springfield, Missouri.

However, the story took a dramatic and thoroughly unpleasant aspect when seven-year-old Daisy Strondsteen found the Image creator with her half eaten hamster by his side. When asked questions by local law enforcement officers, Mr Larsen, 86, said, "Leave it alone. It's my dinner.

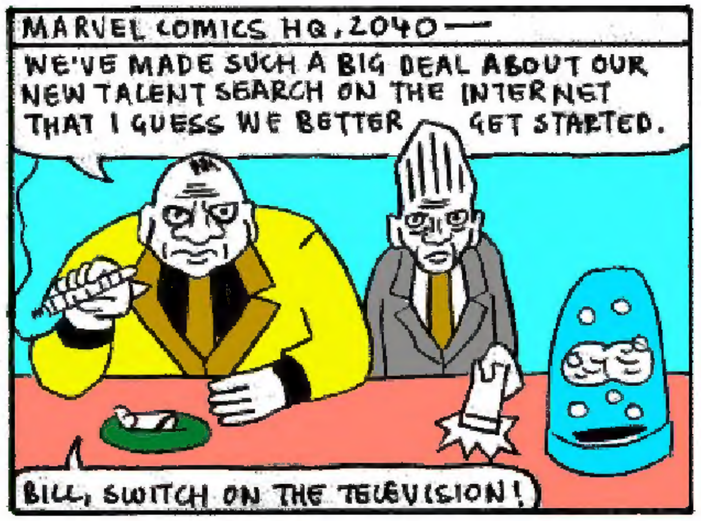
You can't have it, it's mine... all mine, I tells you. Are you my mommy?"

A spokesperson for Mr Larsen at Image Comics said, "I'm sorry but you appear to have the wrong Erik Larsen."

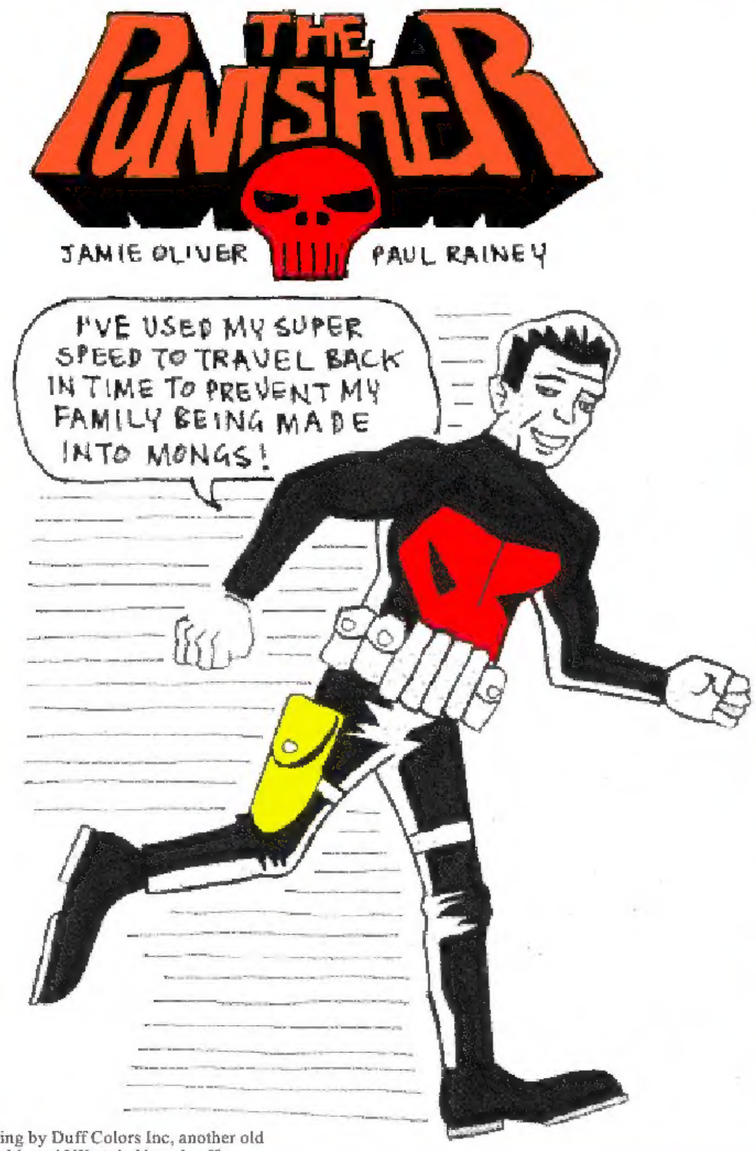
We at *World of Heros* say "A likely story..."

Marvel's new gay comic Spamdagger and Fudge Tunnel – "See? We do care about minorities" claims Jemas

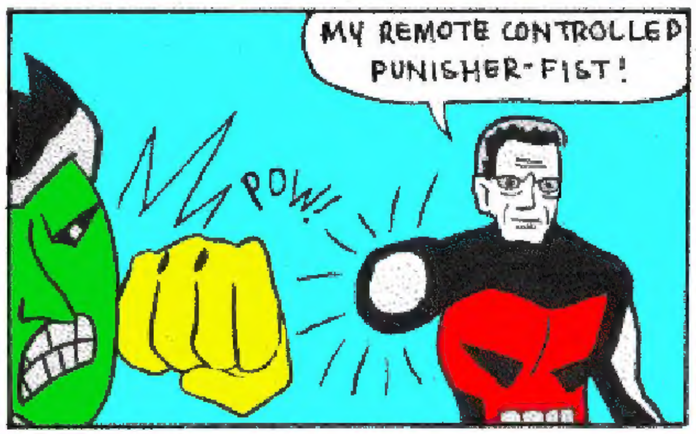
COMICS 2040


MARVEL COMICS HQ, 2040—
WE'VE MADE SUCH A BIG DEAL ABOUT OUR NEW TALENT SEARCH ON THE INTERNET THAT I GUESS WE BETTER GET STARTED.
BILL, SWITCH ON THE TELEVISION!

WHADDA YA THINK? MAYBE WE SHOULD HIRE HIM!
HE HAS WRITTEN SOME BOOKS, ALTHOUGH, ADMITTEDLY, THEY ARE COOK BOOKS, BUT BOOKS NONE THE LESS!


THE PUNISHER
JAMIE OLIVER
PAUL RAINEY
I'VE USED MY SUPER SPEED TO TRAVEL BACK IN TIME TO PREVENT MY FAMILY BEING MADE INTO MONGS!

coloring by Duff Colors Inc, another old Marvel UK styled knock-off



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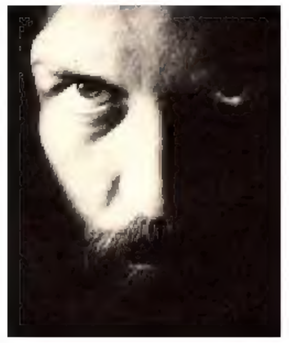
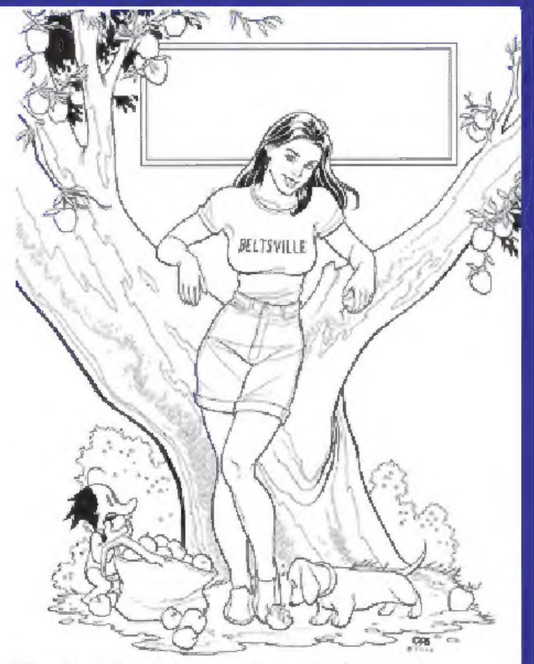
EAGLE AWARDS 2001

Based on votes from over 30 countries, the winners of the awards for comics published in 2000 are:

FAVOURITE COLOUR COMICBOOK: JSA
FAVOURITE BLACK & WHITE COMICBOOK: Liberty Meadows
FAVOURITE NEW COMICBOOK OF 2000: Ultimate Spider-Man
FAVOURITE COMICS WRITER: Alan Moore
FAVOURITE COMICS WRITER/ARTIST: Frank Miller
FAVOURITE COMICS ARTIST (PENCILS): Frank Quitely
FAVOURITE COMICS ARTIST (INKS): Mark Farmer
FAVOURITE COMICS artist (fully painted artwork): Alex Ross
FAVOURITE COLOURIST: Laura DePuy
FAVOURITE COMICS EDITOR: Andy Diggle (Mighty Tharg: 2000 AD)
FAVOURITE MANGA COMIC: Lone Wolf and Cub
FAVOURITE EUROPEAN COMIC: Metabarons (France)
FAVOURITE COMICS CHARACTER: Batman
FAVOURITE COMICS STORY WHICH APPEARED, BEGAN OR ENDED DURING 2000:
The Authority – The Nativity
CHARACTER MOST WORTHY OF OWN ONGOING TITLE: Elijah Snow (Planetary)
FAVOURITE SUPPORTING CHARACTER IN COMICS: Commissioner James Gordon (Batman)
FAVOURITE COMICS COVER PUBLISHED DURING 2000: Ultimate Spider-Man #1 (Joe Quesada)
FAVOURITE COMICS VILLAIN: Lex Luthor (Superman)
FAVOURITE GRAPHIC NOVEL: Safe Area Gorazade (Joe Sacco)
FAVOURITE REPRINT COMPILATION: The Authority – Under New Management
FAVOURITE NEWSPAPER STRIP: Liberty Meadows
FAVOURITE MAGAZINE ABOUT COMICS: Wizard
FAVOURITE COMICS-RELATED BOOK: The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay (Michael Chabon)
FAVOURITE BRITISH COMIC: 2000 AD
FAVOURITE COMIC STRIP TO APPEAR IN A UK COMIC OR MAGAZINE: Nikolai Dante
FAVOURITE BRITISH SMALL PRESS TITLE: Jack Staff
FAVOURITE COMICS RELATED WEBSITE: www.comicbookresources.com
FAVOURITE COMICS E-ZINE: Comic Book Electronic Magazine
FAVOURITE WEB-BASED COMIC: Sluggy Freelance

ESTABLISHED in 1976, the Eagle Award is one of the comics industry's earliest established and most coveted international prizes. Such diverse titles as ***X-Men***, ***Swamp Thing***, ***Preacher***, ***2000 AD*** *and* ***MAD*** *have all proudly featured the Eagle Award emblem on their covers over the past 25 years.*





Liberty Meadows - above - winner of two categories! While Alan Moore - left - wins best writer, yet again!

Left - Frank Miller, a winner yet again!

Below - The Authority, also double winners! Maybe even 3 timers if you count Frank Quitely's award!

Ultimate Spider-Man – winner of two categories (and therefore, technically, Bill Jemas - right - is also the winner of two awards!)

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